

Petra Melichar

Empresses of Late Byzantium

Foreign Brides, Mediators and Pious Women

PETER LANG

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With the exception of the wife of Andronikos III Palaiologos, Anna of Savoy, who acted as regent of Byzantium from 1341 to 1347, the lives of the late Byzantine empresses have so far received little scholarly attention. This study presents the biographies of all fifteen empresses of the Palaiologan dynasty and, based on their experiences, follows the development of the role and position of an empress in the last centuries of the empire. The final analysis considers the selection process for imperial brides and the rituals accompanying their arrival in Constantinople. The author also inquires into their role in public, ritual, and ecclesiastical life and their most important social roles at various stages of life.

The Author

Petra Melichar earned her PhD from Katholieke Universiteit in Leuven in 2012. At present, she is a fellow of the Slavonic Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague and editor-in-chief of the journal Byzantinoslavica (since 2015). Her recent work centers on elite women in the Palaiologan period (1261 – 1453).

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Princess head, detail of Saint George and the Princess, fresco,
Pellegrini Chapel or Giusti, Church of Sant 'Anastasia, Verona
Artist: Antonio Pisano, known as Pisanello(1395-1455)
Date of artwork: 1433-1438
Reviewers: Lynda Garland and Pavel Bocek
Cover Design: © Olaf Gloeckler, Atelier Platen, Friedberg

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To Richard, Helena, Vladimír and Debbie – with my deep thanks

Foreword

About six years ago, the Slavonic Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences announced a vacancy in the Department of Paleoslavonic and Byzantine Studies. Among the applicants for the position was a young lady who was virtually unknown to us. She had studied history not in Prague but at Masaryk University in Brno and then dropped out of sight for several years as she furthered her education abroad. After a year of study in Chicago and one and three semesters respectively at the Institutes of Byzantine Studies in Munich and Vienna, she completed her graduate education under the guidance of Peter Van Deun at Katholieke Universiteit in Leuven. Such an academic record was unique in the Czech Republic at that time, something that was only dreamed of by my generation and all those whose degrees were completed in Czechoslovakia under the communist regime. It was proof of the new possibilities that had opened up for young people after the Velvet Revolution in November 1989. A gifted student, Petra Melichar had taken advantage of the opportunities available to her with her characteristic strength of will and a substantial measure of self-discipline.

The doctoral dissertation she successfully defended in Leuven was titled *Faith and Fate of Palaiologan Women: Female Piety in Late Byzantium*, and the work was truly impressive – not only in its breadth (597 pages) but also in the way it dealt with its topic and in its contribution to humanities and the social sciences. Based on an analysis of the experiences of more than three hundred women in addition to a wide range of secondary literature, her dissertation offered a truly original overview of the spirituality of an otherwise obscure segment of late Byzantine society.

Doubtless owing to the knowledge base she had acquired in researching her dissertation, Petra Melichar was able to submit a well-formulated research aim (in respect to content and methodology) that she planned to investigate contingent on her admission to the Slavonic Institute: to elucidate the position and role of empresses in the society of the Palaiologan era. When I remarked in jest, as is my wont, that Byzantine history ends in 1204 as far as I am concerned and expressed my doubts as to whether there was any reason to study the final years of the Byzantine Empire, the young scholar, as yet unfamiliar with my sense of humor, launched into enthusiastic defense of her project and of the cultural significance of the Palaiologan period as such. Her passionate response not only demonstrated her expertise in the field but also showcased her abilities in debate and discourse as well as her determined self-assurance. Her presentation was absolutely convincing, and the committee voted to admit her to the Institute.

We soon saw that we had made the correct decision. Petra Melichar took her place among her fellow scholars, and it was with particular enthusiasm that she joined the editorial board of the journal *Byzantinoslavica.* A year later, she became editor-in-chief when a senior colleague retired. From the outset, she had a clear concept of what she wanted to achieve as editor, and thanks to her tireless efforts

to widen the circle of contacts she had already formed in her time abroad, she managed to attract a number of new contributors. Of equal importance was the creation of a community of specialists from various areas of Byzantine Studies who were willing to assess the quality of the articles the journal was receiving in order to assure that the high standards and professionalism of the publication were maintained.

The majority of her time and efforts, however, were spent on her declared research aim: to produce a study describing the position and social role of the empresses of the late Byzantine period. Having secured a grant to finance her project, she was able to organize an international workshop called *Lives, Roles and Actions of the Byzantine Empresses (4th – 15th c.)* in Villa Lanna, the impressive conference center of the Czech Academy of Sciences, in September 2015. The purpose of the conference was to map the state of existing research, thereby indicating a starting point for her own work. The gathering was a success. One Australian and seventeen European scholars presented their papers, most of which gradually appeared in subsequent volumes of *Byzantinoslavica* in a revised, occasionally expanded, format.

Despite various challenges, not the least of which was the birth of a lively baby boy, Petra Melichar has completed her monograph. The result is now presented to the scholarly public, who will judge its quality. Over the years, she has consulted her observations, doubts, questions, and new ideas with me, and I must use this opportunity to acknowledge her thoughtful and reasoned approach to her research. As new questions arose from her findings, she continued in her search for answers, and her meticulousness as she investigated the available sources could almost be described as immoderate. She not only read but also made critical use of a varied sample of secondary sources, including monographs, studies, and articles from journals and conference proceedings. While I found the fifteen sketches contained in the biographical chapters interesting, I particularly appreciated the chapters that analyze the position of the Palaiologan empresses in the various phases of their lives, their role at the imperial court and in Byzantine society, their relationship to the ecclesiastical establishment, their behavior and place in dynastic conflicts, their engagement in diplomatic relations, and their educational opportunities. Petra Melichar has fleshed out and enriched our image of late Byzantine society, offered here from a female perspective, and her work helps to fill a noticeable lacuna in current Byzantine research. Although excellent monographs dedicated to empresses of the early and middle Byzantine periods have been published in recent decades, a comprehensive work of this nature for the Palaiologan period was lacking. In this respect as well, the monograph of Petra Melichar represents an important contribution to the field.

Vladimír Vavřínek

Acknowledgments

When artists began signing their paintings towards the end of the Middle Ages, it was only the master who placed his name on the piece. The names of his helpers, who painted parts of the image and performed tasks without which the work could never have been created, often remain unknown. Likewise, the present study could not have been completed without a great deal of external support, and I would like to acknowledge those who helped me with this project in its various stages.

My thanks belong to Vladimír Vavřínek, my honored colleague from the Slavonic Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague, who was a constant support and encouragement to me, reading and commenting on individual chapters. I was also very fortunate that Lynda Garland, a specialist in the field of Byzantine empresses (and a wonderful person), was willing to review the manuscript. I am thankful for her notes, suggestions, and bibliographical recommendations, all of which greatly improved the text. I would also like to thank my other reviewer, Pavel Boček from Masaryk University in Brno, for reading the manuscript and bringing to my attention relevant literature and artifacts. As English is not my mother tongue, I would like to express my deep thanks to Cindy Palacká, who not only corrected the text but, by her stimulating feedback and questions, frequently helped me improve the content as well. I am likewise much obliged to Jan Dvořák for his advice regarding images, to Karel Sklenář and Petr Přenosil for preparing the maps, and to Jirka Mikulášek for putting the finishing touches on the family trees of important late Byzantine dynasties.

I am also grateful to the Director of the Slavonic Institute, Václav Čermák, and the Vice Director, Helena Ulbrechtová, for their help in negotiating the publication of this work. Furthermore, I am much obliged to my colleagues from the Library of the Slavonic Institute, Jaroslav Zítka, Hana Volková, Jana Suková and Dana Pilátová, for bringing books and studies to my attention and for allowing me to access various publications both during and outside opening hours. I am also thankful for the friendship, support and encouragement of my colleague Martina Čechová. Finally, I would like to thank Jana Šlechtová and Dagmar Štěpánková for taking care of the administrative matters related to this project.

My sincere thanks also go to the Institute of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies of the University of Vienna, which generously allowed me free access to their library resources. As far as the images are concerned, I must acknowledge the Library of Dumbarton Oaks, Musées d'art et d'histoire, Ville de Genève, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, the British National Library, and Musée du Louvre and their excellent staff, who provided high-definition images. I am also very grateful to many fellow Byzantinists and scholars who generously shared their knowledge, sent me articles I could not have accessed otherwise, and gave me valuable advice on sources and literature. Concerning the publication of this

monograph, I am very thankful to my editors, Ms. Ute Winkelkötter, Ms. Katharina Wlost and Ms. Sharmila Kirouchenadassou for all their help, notes and suggestions.

My final thanks belong to my family, especially to my husband, Richard, and to my parents, Helena and Vladimír, without whose support and willingness to sacrifice their free time to look after our children this project could never have come into being. I am also grateful to my parents-in-law, Richard and Burgi, for their many kindnesses. Finally, I would also like to express my gratitude to Deborah Nelson for her friendship and for everything she modelled and taught me.

Contents

List of Abbreviations

AASS	*Acta Sanctorum Bollandiana*, Brussels 1643–1779; Paris and Rome 1866–1887; Brussels 1965–1970.
ABME	*Archeion ton Byzantinon Mnemeion tes Hellados (Ἀρχεῖον τῶν Βυζαντινῶν Μνημείων τῆς Ἑλλάδος)*, Athens 1935–.
Acta patriarchatus	*Acta patriarchatus Constantinopolitani MCCCXV–MCCCCII e codicibus manu scriptis Bibliothecae Palatinae Vindobonensis. . .* (= *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi sacra et profana*, I–II), F. Miklosich–I. Müller (eds.), Vienna 1960–1962, (Originally published as *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevii*, I–VI, Vienna 1860–1890.)
Actes d'Esphigménou	*Actes d'Esphigménou*, (Archives de l'Athos, 6), J. Lefort (ed.), Paris 1973.
Actes de Chilandar	*Actes de Chilandar*, L. Petit–B. Korablev (eds.), *VV* 17, 1911, Priloženie 1.
Actes de Dionysiou	*Actes de Dionysiou*, (Archives de l'Athos, 4), N. Oikonomides (ed.), Paris 1968.
Actes de Docheiariou	*Actes de Docheiariou*, (Archives de l'Athos, 13), N. Oikonomides (ed.), Paris 1984.
Actes de Gregoire X	*Actes de Gregoire X*, J. Guiraud (ed.), Paris 1892–1906.
Actes de Kutlumus	*Actes de Kutlumus*, (Archives de l'Athos, 2), P. Lemerle (ed.), Paris 1988.
Actes de Lavra	*Actes de Lavra* I–IV, (Archives de l'Athos, 5, 8, 10 f.), P. Lemerle–A. Guillou–N. Svoronos–D. Papachrysanthou (eds.), Paris 1970–1982.
Actes de Panteleimon	*Actes de Saint-Pantéleimon*, (Archives de l'Athos, 12), P. Lemerle (ed.), Paris 1982.
Actes de St. Jean Prodrome	*Les archives de Saint-Jean Prodrome sur le mont Ménécée*, A. Guillou (ed.), Paris 1955.
Actes de Xénophon	*Actes de Xénophon*, *Texte*, (Archives de l'Athos, 15), D. Papachrysanthou (ed.), Paris 1986.
Actes de Xeropotamou	*Actes de Xeropotamou*, (Archives de l'Athos, 3), J. Bompaire (ed.), Paris 1964.
Actes de Zographou	*Actes de Zographou*, W. Regel–E. Kurtz–B. Korablev (eds.), *VV* 13, 1907, Priloženie 1.
Akindynos, Letters	Gregory Akindynos, *Letters of Gregory Akindynos*, (*CFHB*, 21), A. Constantinides Hero (ed.), Washington, D.C. 1983.

Akropolites	George Akropolites, *Historia*, A. Heisenberg (ed.), Leipzig 1903.
Alp-Talwar, Panaretos	*The Chronicle of Michael Panaretos*, A. Alp-Talwar (trans.) in: *Byzantium's Other Empire: Trebizond*, A. Eastmond (ed.), Istanbul 2016.
Anna Komnene	Anna Komnene, *Annae Comnenae Alexias* I–II, (*CFHB*, 40/I–II). D. R. Reinsch–A. Kambylis (eds.), Berlin 2001.
Annales ecclesiastici	*Annales ecclesiastici*, XVIII, O. Raynaldus (ed.), Roma 1659.
Annales Genuenses	*Annales Genuenses*, G. J. Stella (ed.), in: *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* 17/2, G. Petti Balbi (ed.), Bologna 1975.
Annales Veronenses	*Annales Veronenses de Romano,* C. Cipolla (ed.), Venezia 1890.
Archivio di San Giorgio	*Archivio di San Giorgio, Cartolario della Masseria di Pera, per l'anno 1391*, (Atti della Società Ligure di Storia Patria, 13), L. T. Belgrano (ed.), Genoa 1884.
ArchPont	*Archeion Pontou (Ἀρχεῖον Πόντου)*, Athen 1928–.
Arsenij, Proizvedenija	*Nila mitropolita Rodosskago, Četyre neizdannyja proizvedenija*, Arsenij (ed.), Moscow 1891, 1–54.
Athanasios	*The Correspondence of Athanasius I Patriarch of Constantinople*, (*CFHB*, 7), A.-M. Talbot (ed.), Washington, D.C. 1975.
Auriae, Annales	*Annales*, J. Auriae (ed.), in: *MGH, Scriptores* XVIII, G.H. Pertz (ed.), Hannover 1863, (reprint. Stuttgart–New York 1963).
Balfour, Symeon of Thess.	*Politico-Historical Works of Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica. Critical Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, (Wiener Byzantinistische Studien, 13), D. Balfour (ed.), Wien 1979.
Bandini	*Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum bibliothecae Laurentianae*, I–III, A. M. Bandini (ed.), Florence 1764–1770 (reprint. 1961).
Basilica	*Basilicorum libri* LX, Series A, Textus, H. J. Scheltema–N. Van der Wal (eds.), I–VIII, Groningen 1955–1988.
Bekker, Historia	*Historia politica et patriarchica Constantinoupoleos*, I. Bekker (ed.), Bonn 1849.
BF	*Byzantinische Forschungen: Internationale Zeitschrift für Byzantinistik*, Amsterdam 1966–.
Blum, Plethon	Georgios Gemisthos Plethon, *Georgios Gemisthos Plethon: Politik, Philosophie und Rhetorik im spätbyzantinischen Reich, 1355–1452*, (Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur, 25), W. Blum (trans.), Stuttgart 1988.

BMFD	*Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments*, vols. I–V, (Dumbarton Oaks Studies, 35), A. Constantinides Hero–G. Constable–R. Allison–J. Thomas (trans., commentary), Washington, D.C. 2001.
BNJ	*Byzantinisch-neugriechische Jahrbücher*, Athen–Berlin 1920–.
Bogiatzides, Chronikon	*To chronikon ton Meteoron (Τὸ χρονικὸν τῶν Μετεώρων)*, I, *EEBS* 1, 1924, 139–175; II, *EEBS* 2, 1925, 149–182, I. K. Bogiatzides (ed.).
Branouses, Inscriptions	*Byzantina engrafa tes mones Patmou (Βυζαντινὰ ἔγγραφα τῆς μονῆς Πάτμου),* I–II, E. L. Branouses (ed.), Athen 1980.
Bryennios	Iosef Bryennios, *Werke*, I–III, E. Bulgares–Th. Mandakases (eds.), Leipzig 1768–1784.
BSl	*Byzantinoslavica–revue des études byzantines*, Prague 1929–1999, 2003–.
Byz	*Byzantion*, Brussels 1924–.
BZ	*Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, Leipzig–München–Stuttgart 1892–.
Cammelli, Kydones	Démétrios Kydones, *Correspondance*, G. Cammelli (ed.), Paris 1930.
Canart, Codices	*Codices Vaticani graeci, 1745*–1962, P. Canart (ed.), Vatican 1970.
Carroll, Sphrantzes	*A Contemporary Greek Source for the Siege of Constantinople 1453: The Sphrantzes Chronicle*, M. Carroll (trans.), Amsterdam 1985.
Chalkokondyles	Laonikos Chalkokondyles, *Laonici Chalcocondylae Historiarum Demonstrationes*, I–II, E. Darkó (ed.), Budapest 1922–1927.
Chronica XXIV	*Chronica XXIV generalium ordinis minorum cum pluribus appendicibus (...). Analecta Franciscana sice Chronica aliaque varia documenta ad historiam fratrum minorum spectantia edita a patribus Collegii S. Bonaventurae*, t. III. Quaracchi 1897 (Reprint.) Biblioteca Bio-Bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'Oriente Franciscano, T. III, P. G. Golubovitch (ed.), Quaracchi 1919.
Chronique d'Arménie	Jean Dardel, *Chronique d'Arménie*, in: *Recueil des historiens des Croisades, Documents armeniens*, vol. 1, Paris 1869, 1–109.
Chroniques gréco-romanes	*Chroniques gréco-romanes inédits où peu connues publiées avec notes et tables généalogiques*, Ch. Hopf (ed.), Berlin 1873.

CFHB	*Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae.*
Clavijo	R. G. Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlan*, G. Le Strange (ed.), London 1928.
CMH	*The Cambridge Medieval History IV, The Byzantine Empire,* J. M. Hussey (ed.), Cambridge 1966.
Codex Arpadianus	*Codex diplomaticus Arpadianus continuatus*, in: *Monumenta Hungariae Historica*, *Diplomataria*, vol. 12, G. Wenzel (ed.), Budapest 1969.
Codex Hungaricus	*Codex diplomaticus patrius Hungaricus*, vol. VIII, I. Nagy (ed.), Budapest 1981.
Codex Upsaliensis gr.	*Codex Upsaliensis* gr. 28, (Eine Gemeinschaftsarbeit von Mitgliedern d. Byz.-Neugr. Sem. d. FU Berlin unter Leitung von G. H. Karlsson (eds.)), Stockholm 1981.
CSHB	*Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae.* *Contra Prochorum*
Cydonium	*Tomus synodicus II, Contra Prochorum Cydonium, PG* 151, cols. 693–716.
Cronica del Montferrato	Gaoletto del Carreto, *Cronica del Montferrato*, in: *Monumenta Historiae Patriae, SS*, III, Torino 1848, cols. 1161–1176.
Cronica ducum	*Cronica ducum de Brunswick*, in: *MGH*, *Scriptores qui vernacula lingua usi sunt, vol. 2, Deutsche Chroniken und andere Geschichtsbücher des Mittelalters*, Hannover 1877, 577–587. *Darrouzès, Lettre inédite* Lettre inédite de Jean Cantacuzène relative à la controverse palamite, J. Darrouzès (ed.), *REB* 17, 1959, 7–27.
Darrouzès, Regestes	*Les regestes des actes du patriarcat de Constantinople* V (I/5: Les regestes de 1310 à 1376), VI (I/6: Les regestes de 1377 à 1410), J. Darrouzès (ed.), Paris 1977.
DchAE	*Deltion tes Christianikes Archeiologikes Hetaireias (Δελτίον τῆς Χριστιανικῆς Ἀρχειολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας)*, Athens 1892–.
De administrando imperio	Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio* (*CFHB*, 1), G. Moravcsik (ed.), R. J. H. Jenkins (trans.), Washington, D.C. 1967 (1st published in Budapest 1949).
De cerimoniis	Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, I–II, (*CSHB*), J. J. Reiske (ed.), Bonn 1829, 1830.
De matrimonio	Manuel Palaiologos, *Manuelis Palaelogi Dialogum de matrimonio*, C. Bevegni (ed.), Catania 1989.

Delehaye, Typica	*Deux typica byzantins de l'époque des Paléologues*, (*Mémoires de l'Académie de Belgique, Classe des lettres*, ser. II, 13/4), H. Delehaye (ed.), Brussels 1921.
Demetrios Chomatianos	Demetrios Chomatianos, J. B. Pitra (ed.), in: *Analecta Sacra Spicilegio Solesmensi Parata*, Rome 1981, vol. VII (VI).
Dennis, Short Chronicle	*The Short Chronicle of Lesbos, 1355–1428*, G. T. Dennis (ed.), *Lesbiaka* 5, 1965, 3–24, text 5–7.
DIEE	*Deltion tes Historikes kai Ethnologikes Hetaireias tes Hellados (Δελτίον τῆς Ἱστορικῆς καὶ Ἐθνολογικῆς Ἑταιρεῖας τῆς Ἑλλάδος)*, Athens 1883–.
Digesta	*Corpus Iuris Civilis* (CIC), T. Mommsen–P. Krueger *et al.* (eds.), 3 vols., Berlin 1928–1929, vol. I, part 2.
Diplomatarium	*Diplomatarium Veneto-Levantinum, sive Acta et Diplomata res Venetas, Graecas atque Levantis illustrantia a 1300–1454*, in: M. G. Thomas–R. Predelli (eds.), *Monumenti storici publicati dalla Reale Deutazione Veneta di Storia Patria*, serie prima documenti, Venice 1880.
Dmitrievskij	*Opisanie liturgičeskich rukopisej chranjašichsja v bibliotekach pravoslavnago vostoka (Описание литургических рукописей хранящихся въ библиотекахъ православнаго востока)*, A. Dmitrievskij (ed.), Petrograd 1917, I–III (reprint. 1965).
Dölger, Praktika	*Sechs byzantinische Praktika des 14. Jhs. für das Athoskloster Iberon*, (Abh. d. Bayer. Akad. d. Wiss., phil.-hist. Kl. N.F., 28), F. Dölger (ed.), München 1949.
Dölger, Regesten	*Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches*, III–V, IV–V, F. Dölger (ed.), München 1960–1965, III, München 1977.
DOP	*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Washington, D.C. 1941–.
DOS	*Dumbartom Oaks Studies*, Washington, D.C.
Dossier Lyons	*Dossier grec de l'Union de Lyon (1273–1277)*, V. Laurent–J. Darrouzès (eds.), Paris 1976.
Doukas	(Michael) Doukas, *Istoria Turco-Bizantina, 1341–1462*, (Scriptores byzantini, I), V. Grecu (ed.), Bukarest 1958.
Ecloga	*Ecloga: Das Gesetzbuch Leons III. und Konstantinos V.*, L. Burgmann (ed.), Frankfurt 1983.
Ecthesis Chronica	*Ecthesis chronica*, S. Lambros (ed.), London 1902 (reprint. Amsterdam 1969).
EkklPhar	*Ekklesiastikos Faros (Ἐκκλησιαστικὸς Φάρος)*, Alexandria–Addis Abeba 1908–.

Enthym	*Enthymeseon etoi chronikon semeiomaton sylloge prote (Ἐνθυμήσεων ἤτοι χρονικῶν σημειωμάτων συλλογὴ πρώτη)*, *NE* 7, 1910, 113–313.
EO	*Échos d'Orient*, Paris 1897/98–1940.
Ephraim	Ephraim, *PG* 143, 11–380.
Ermolinskaja letopis	*Ermolinskaja letopis*, (Polnoe Sobranie Russkich Letopisej, 23), 1910.
Eugenikos	John Eugenikos, *Rede an Konstantin XI*, in: *LPP* I, S. P. Lampros (ed.), Athens 1912, 123–134.
Eustathios of Thess.	Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Eustathii Thessalonicensis Opera Minora*, P. Wirth (ed.), Berlin–New York 2000.
Eustratiades	*Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts in the library of the Monastery of Vatopedi on the Mount Athos*, S. Eustratiades–A. Vatopedinos (eds.), Cambridge 1924.
Fatouros, Kantakouzenos	*John Kantakuzenos*, I–II, (Bibliothek d. griech. Lit., 17, 21), G. Fatouros–T. Krischer (trans.), Stuttgart 1982–1986.
Goar, Euchologion	*Euchologion (Εὐχολόγιον)*, J. Goar (ed.), Paris 1730 (2nd ed.).
Goodacre, Handbook	*A Handbook of the Coinage of the Byzantine Empire*, H. Goodacre (ed.), London 1967.
Gouillard, Synodikon	*Le synodikon de l'orthodoxie*, J. Gouillard (ed.), *TM* 2, 1967, 1–316.
Grecu, Sphrantzes	Georgios Sphrantzes, *Memorii 1401–1477*, and (annexed) Pseudo-Sphrantzes, Macarie Melissenos, *Cronica 1258–1481*, V. Grecu (ed.), Bukarest 1966.
Gregoras	Nikephoros Gregoras, *Byzantina Historia*, I–II, (*CSHB*), L. Schopen (ed.), Bonn 1829, 1830; vol. III, I. Bekker (ed.), Bonn 1855.
Gregoras, Antirrhetika	Nikephoros Gregoras, *Antirrhetika* I: Einleitung, Textausgabe, Übersetzung und Anmerkungen (Wiener Byzantinistische Studien, 12), H.-V. Beyer (ed.), Wien 1976.
Gregoras, Epistulae	Nikephoros Gregoras, *Nicefori Gregorae Epistulae*, I–II, P. A. M. Leone (ed.), Matino 1982–1983.
Gregoras, Solutiones	Nikephoros Gregoras, *Solutiones questionum*, P. A. M. Leone (ed.), *Byz* 40, 1970, 488–513.
Gregoras, Vie de Jean	Nikephoros Gregoras, *La vie de Jean, métropolite d'Héraclée du Pont*, V. Laurent (ed.), *ArchPont* 6, 1934, 3–67.
Guiraud, Registres	*Les registres d'Urbain IV*, J. Guiraud (ed.), Paris 1901–1929.
Hell	*Hellenika (Ἑλληνικά)*, Athens 1928–.

Hierosolymitike bibliotheke	*Hierosolymitike bibliotheke (Ἱεροσολυμιτική βιβλιοθήκη)*, A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus (ed.), Petersburg 1891–1915.
Historia Montis Ferrati	*Historia Montis Ferrati*, B. Di San Georgio (ed.), in: *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, XXIII, L. Muratori (ed.), Milan 1733.
Hofmann, Epistolae	*Epistolae Pontificiae ad Concilium Florentinum Spectantes*, G. Hofmann (ed.), Rome 1940–1946.
Holobolos	Manuel Holobolos, *Manuelis Holoboli orationes*, I–II, M. Treu (ed.), Programm des königlichen Victoria-Gymnasiums zu Potsdam, Potsdam 1906–1907.
Holy Women of Byzantium	*Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation*, (Byzantine Saints' Lives in Translation, 1), A.-M. Talbot (ed.), Washington, D.C. 2006 (1st ed. 1996).
Hunger, Urkunden	Zwei byzantinischen Urkunden, H. Hunger (ed.), *BZ* 48, 1955, 297–308.
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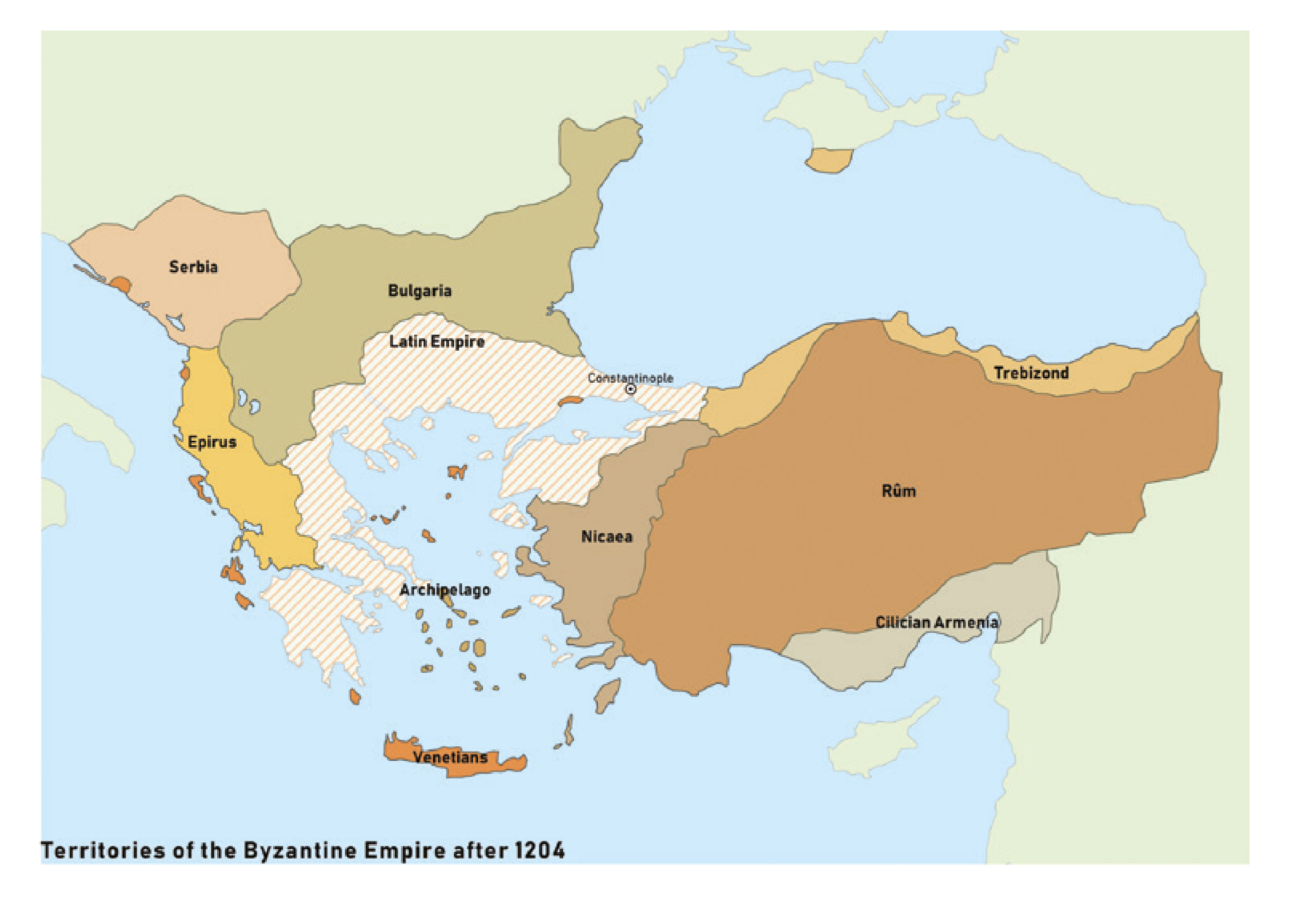
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ZRVI	*Zbornik radova, Vizantološki Institut*, vols. 1–6, *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog Instituta*, 7–, Belgrade 1952–1960; 1961–.

Maps



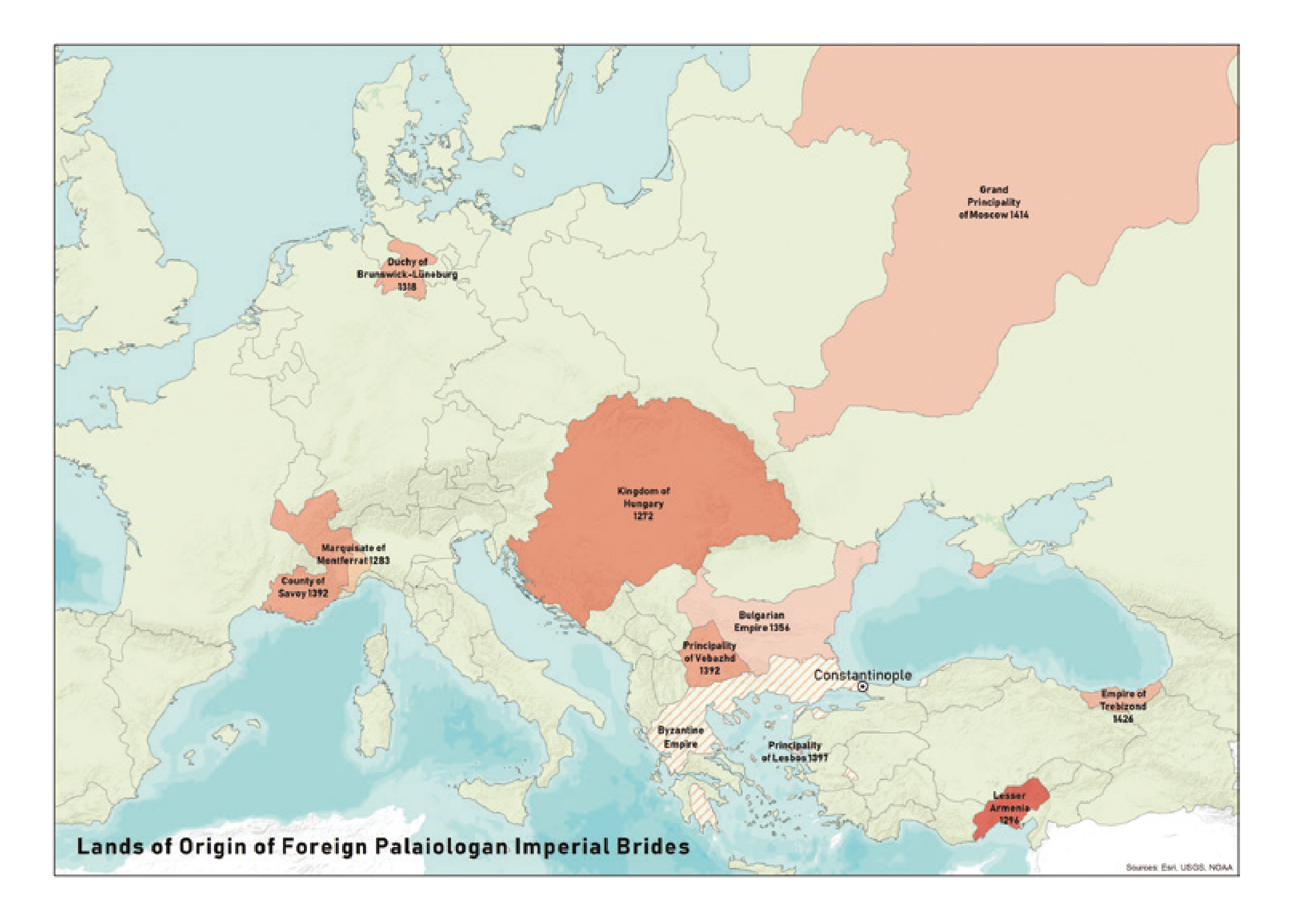
Map 1: *The City of Constantinople (Based on Starší dějiny pro střední školy © Didaktis s.r.o.)*



Map 2: *The Byzantine Empire after 1204 (Petra Melichar)*



Map 3: *The Byzantine Empire in the Late Middle Ages (Based on Starší dějiny pro střední školy © Didaktis s.r.o.)*



Map 4: *Lands of Origin of Palaiologan Imperial Brides (Petra Melichar)*

Introduction

On the Feast of Orthodoxy, Greek Orthodox Christians come together to celebrate the beliefs proclaimed by their church, but they also use the occasion to commemorate the Byzantine emperors, empresses, and patriarchs who held fast to those doctrines until death. Among them are the names of nine late Byzantine empresses:

> Theodora, who assuming the divine and angelic dress became the nun Eugenia, eternal be her memory. Eirene (. . .) Eirene (. . .) Maria our lady, who assuming the divine and angelic dress became the nun Xene (. . .) Anna (. . .) our lady who assuming the divine and angelic dress became the nun Anastasia, who by her actions and words fought throughout her life and with all her soul to confirm the ecclesiastical teachings of the Apostles and the Church Fathers and to exterminate the evil and godless heresies of Barlaam and Akindynos and their partisans (. . .) Eirene, our (. . .) lady, who assuming the divine and angelic dress became the nun Eugenia (. . .) Anna (. . .) Helene our (. . .) lady, who assuming the divine and angelic dress became the nun Hypomone (. . .) Maria our (. . .) lady, who assuming the divine and angelic dress became the nun Makaria, eternal be her memory.[1]

Set within the dramatic, final centuries of the Byzantine Empire, the stories of these empresses (and six others who are not mentioned in the list) not only reveal the realities of life as they experienced it but also offer unique perspectives from which to view Byzantine society and history from the emergence of the Palaiologan dynasty until the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453. As Kazhdan and Epstein persuasively argued in their monograph *Change in the Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries,*[2] the empire evolved under the Komnenos dynasty, moving away from the legacy of Late Antiquity and acquiring the features of a medieval state even though it never developed some of its forms (such as a feudal system in the Western sense). Kinship with the emperor became an increasingly valuable commodity, and members of the imperial family who had remained in the background in earlier centuries began to play important roles in the political, religious, and cultural life of the empire with growing frequency.

After the initial revival following the Byzantine reconquest of Constantinople in 1261, the empire suffered a progressive loss of territory under the Palaiologans, especially in Asia Minor. This loss contributed to a decrease in the number of important noble families that could be expected to contend for the imperial throne. It is certainly no accident that during the nearly two hundred years of Palaiologan rule, no emperor was killed fighting against a usurper. While the struggle for the

1 *Gouillard, Synodikon*, 101 f.

2 Kazhdan–Epstein (1985).

throne persisted, it now took place mostly within the imperial family itself (as the conflicts and/or rivalry between John V and Matthew Kantakouzenos, John V and Andronikos IV, or John VII and Manuel II demonstrate).

This concept of imperial power resting firmly in the hands of one dynasty also affected the standing of the female members of the ruling family. When so many members of the court were connected to the reigning house by blood or marriage, public matters often became family matters. Family conflicts, in turn, could develop into civil strife or even civil war as the prolonged struggle between Andronikos II and Andronikos III demonstrated. At the same time, it was this blurred boundary between the private and the public spheres that frequently brought the women of the imperial family, who had been carefully protected in the seclusion of the women's quarters (*gynaecea*) in earlier times, into new roles in the political arena.

The mere notion of a ruling empress was traditionally a problematic one in Byzantium. In the first place, women were deemed unfit for military leadership, which constituted a significant handicap, considering that defending and, when the opportunity presented itself, expanding the boundaries of the empire was one of the central tasks of a ruler. While occasionally an empress was able to overcome this obstacle with the aid of capable eunuchs (Eirene the Athenian), the basic skepticism regarding the ability of a female to govern remained firmly entrenched in Byzantine society and found expression in the derisive comments made by several Palaiologan historians. One of them was Doukas, who while describing the reign of Anna of Savoy, scathingly noted that "the empire, in female hands, is like a weaver's shuttle spinning awry and twisting the thread of the purple robe." [3] Their disapproval was no doubt connected with the prevalent medieval perception of women as weak, unstable, prone to sin, and given to excessive emotion. Coupled with misunderstood Biblical ideas regarding women and leadership, these notions certainly reflected on the standing of the empress, causing her to be regarded as a less-than-desirable choice for the position of sovereign.[4]

Despite this unfavorable predisposition of Byzantine society towards female rulers, women ascended the imperial throne in the early and middle periods time and again.[5] Most notably, when an emperor had only female offspring, his eldest daughter succeeded him and either legitimized a new dynasty by marriage (e.g.,

3 Johanna of Savoy was known as Anna Palaiologina throughout her reign in Byzantium. Nevertheless, as there were three late Byzantine empresses with that same name, they are referred to as Anna of Savoy, Anna of Hungary, and Anna of Moscow throughout this study to avoid confusion. For the passage in Doukas, see *Doukas*, 47 (VI,1). (Trans.) *Magoulias, Doukas*, 67. For a criticism of the same empress's leadership abilities, see *Gregoras* II, 763 f. (XV,5). For further criticism of Palaiologan empresses, see Melichar (2016).

4 Exceptions to this rule are Zoe and Theodora, the last members of the very popular Macedonian dynasty, who were favored by the Byzantine people over Emperor Michael V, Zoe's adoptive son, when he attempted to intern Zoe in a monastery.

5 Herrin (2001), 23 f.

Ariadne or Zoe the Macedonian) or named a successor towards the end of her life (Theodora the Macedonian). On other occasions, an imperial widow married a pretender to the throne and, in so doing, lent legitimacy to his rule (Maria of 'Alania'). Finally, imperial widows and mothers could assume power on behalf of a minor son (e.g., Eirene, the mother of Constantine VI, or Theodora, the mother of Michael III).

As premature death was rare among the emperors of the Palaiologan dynasty and male offspring abundant, the paths by which earlier generations of empresses had entered the political limelight were closed to the empresses of late Byzantium (the only exception being Anna of Savoy, the wife of Andronikos III, who became a regent until her son came of age). Furthermore, a dynasty with an adequate supply of male heirs had no domestic political use for its female children, who became pawns in the external politics of the empire as a result, marrying neighboring rulers in order to secure Byzantium's borders and create desperately needed military alliances.

Even though only one of the fifteen empresses of this period ruled autonomously (and that for only five and a half years), historical sources portray the imperial consorts of the Palaiologan era in a variety of situations and roles that imply their relatively frequent and direct participation in public life. Eirene-Yolanda and Maria-Rita ruled Thessalonike independently (as did the aforementioned Anna of Savoy) while Eirene Kantakouzene, Helene Palaiologina, and Helene Dragaš were charged with governing Constantinople and other cities of the empire in the absence of their husbands and, later, their sons. On at least one occasion, Anna of Savoy led an international peace mission and negotiated with the ruling couple of Serbia. Other imperial consorts were called on to mediate quarrels within the imperial family.[6] Eirene Kantakouzene, for example, negotiated with her brothers, son, and son-in-law on behalf of her husband, and Maria-Rita brokered peace between her father-in-law and son in the course of the First Civil War. Empresses also acted as patrons of scholars, and at least one of these women, Helene Palaiologina, was involved in scholarly pursuits of her own.[7] In addition to showing an interest in scholarship, Theodora Palaiologina refounded two convents in Constantinople and provided them with monastic rules.

The participation of the late Byzantine empresses in politics, society, and culture was not an isolated phenomenon but was paralleled in the activities of princesses and noblewomen, most of whom were related to the imperial family. In recent decades, scholars have frequently remarked on the social status and prominent position of these women.[8] Representative examples include the two sisters of

6 For late Byzantine women involved in diplomatic missions, see Melichar (2017).

7 For information and sources on these empresses, see the respective chapters.

8 The list of works is rapidly expanding. Important studies include Laiou (1981); Laiou (1985); Connor (2004); Shepard (2008), 67–68; Brooks (2007A); Brooks (2007B), Brooks (2006); Effenberger (2006); Gerstel–Talbot (2006); Kalopissi-Verti (2006); Kianka

Michael VIII, Maria[9] and Eirene,[10] who were deeply involved in the opposition to the Union of Lyons (which attempted to effect a reconciliation between Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Catholicism). Theodora Synadene Palaiologina[11] and Eirene Choumnaina[12] founded prominent monastic foundations while Theodora Raoulaina,[13] an important patron of scholarship, copied at least one manuscript and wrote the *Life of St. Theodore and St. Theophanes*.[14] These and other noblewomen also sponsored artists and scholars, rebuilt monastic houses, ordered poems, and commissioned icons and copies of manuscripts. As preserved nunnery rules reveal, noblewomen also became involved in the social issues of their day, allowing destitute women and perhaps even refugees to enter their monastic foundations, providing free medical care, and distributing food to the poor on certain feast days.

01 Briefly on the sources

The main sources[15] of information on the lives of the Palaiologan empresses are textual in nature: chronicles, correspondence, monastic rules, hagiographic texts, poetry, and monastic registers. Findings from auxiliary historical disciplines, including sigillography, numismatics, and codicology as well as modern archeological research, architecture, and art history, also provide valuable information. While it is impossible to introduce each of the primary sources, the following passage mentions the ones most relevant to this study.

Several late Byzantine *chronicles* include references to imperial consorts. The work of George Akropolites,[16] *Chronike syngraphe*, covers events that occurred between 1203 and 1261. A scholar and a politician, Akropolites was the prime minister (*megas logothetes*) and close associate of Michael VIII Palaiologos. His work details the history of the Nicene Empire and the restoration of the Byzantine Empire following the reconquest of Constantinople in 1261. It also provides valuable information concerning the marriage and family situation of Theodora Palaiologina as well as a description of her Nicene coronation. His writings are complemented by several other accounts, including the chronicle of Theodore Skoutariotes, the metropolitan of Kyzikos (1277–1282).[17] Though more compiler than historian,

(1996); Kotzabassi (2011); Kyrris (1982); Nicol (1996); Talbot (1983); Talbot (1994A); Talbot (2001A); Talbot (2001B); Malamut (2014B).

9 *PLP*, n. 21389.

10 *PLP*, n. 21360.

11 *PLP*, n. 21381.

12 *PLP*, n. 30936.

13 *PLP*, n. 10943.

14 For edition and further information, see *Vita Ss. Theophanis et Theodori*. Sode (2001).

15 For editions and translations of the various sources, refer to the *List of Abbreviations* and to the Primary Sources section of the *Bibliography*.

16 *ODB* I, 49. For further details, see *Akropolites*.

17 *ODB* III, 1912 f. For further details, see *Skoutariotes*.

his work supplies important information and confirms events described by other authors. Another source for this period is the chronicle of Ephraim.[18] Written in dodecasyllabic verse, it recounts Late Roman and Byzantine history from the first century until 1261; however, most of the information is merely repeated from other sources.

Focusing on events following the reconquest of Constantinople, the large body of work by George Pachymeres,[19] a member of the patriarchal clergy, covers roughly the period from 1260 to 1308. Pachymeres describes the reign of Michael VIII and, in part, that of his son, Andronikos II. A versatile scholar and perspicacious observer, he was not fond of Michael VIII (unlike his mentor, George Akropolites) and strongly opposed the Union of Lyons. He was also critical of Patriarch Athanasios I and his policies. The writings of Pachymeres furnish, for example, information on Theodora Palaiologina, such as her signing the *Confession of Faith* at the Synod of Blacherns in 1283 and her intervention on behalf of the opponents of the Union. The author also noted the support offered by Anna of Hungary to the persecuted anti-Unionists in Asia Minor and the circumstances of her death and burial.

Another important historian of late Byzantium was the polymath Nikephoros Gregoras,[20] who described the events of the reigns of Andronikos II, Michael IX, Andronikos III, John V, and John VI. Gregoras's *Roman History* (*Rhomaike historia*) covers a lengthy period from approximately 1204 until 1359. This broad and generally reliable account offers details on economic, administrative, and constitutional aspects of the Byzantine Empire of Gregoras's day. The final part of the account narrows its focus to Gregoras's struggle against Gregory Palamas. In respect to empresses, the historian had little to say about Theodora, whom he did not know, and he only mentions Anna of Hungary in passing. On the other hand, he is the author of the infamous image of Eirene-Yolanda of Montferrat, whom he depicted as a shameless gossip and a foreigner bent on dividing the empire among her sons. Nor did he favor Anna of Savoy, another foreign-born empress, whom he criticized for the part she played in the Second Civil War (1341–1347) as well as in the dissemination of the doctrine of Gregory Palamas, his theological opponent. Not a true misogynist, Gregoras praised Maria-Rita of Armenia for her conversion to Orthodoxy and openly celebrated the intelligence, abilities, perseverance, and piety of Eirene Kantakouzene; however, Eirene's daughter, Helene Palaiologina, incurred the historian's displeasure for promoting the Palamite cause.[21]

The account of John Kantakouzenos,[22] *Historiai* (*Memoires*), represents another important source on the history of fourteenth-century Byzantium. It is not, however,

18 *ODB* II, 708. For further details, see *Ephraim.*
19 For further details, see *Pachymeres*. For a brief biography and overview of this author, see Laiou (1972), 345–348. See also *ODB* III, 1550.
20 For further details, see *Gregoras. ODB* II, 874.
21 For details and citations, see the individual biographical chapters.
22 For further details, see *Kantakouzenos. ODB* II, 1050 f.

an ordinary historical account; the desire of the author to prove himself at once a hero and a victim of circumstance is impossible to overlook. In spite of this bias, his eyewitness accounts and firsthand knowledge of people and situations in the period from 1320 to 1365 provide a wealth of valuable information from a historical perspective. Concerning the empresses, Kantakouzenos did not slander Maria-Rita, who was jealous of his influence over her son, nor did he openly criticize Anna of Savoy, who doubtless belonged among his most bitter enemies for a time. Nevertheless, he took surreptitious revenge on these women by being selective regarding the information he chose to emphasize in connection with them. A good example is his description of the events surrounding the illness of Andronikos III in 1329/1330. Kantakouzenos carefully details Andronikos's repeated refusal to allow his mother, Maria-Rita, to participate in the regency for his unborn child, including Andronikos's reasoning that it would be impossible for two women to jointly rule the empire. Interestingly, Kantakouzenos has little to say about the women of his own family. Though he concedes the intelligence of his wife Eirene and speaks honorably about her (as one might expect), his praise sounds dim when compared with that of Gregoras or Kantakouzenos's ally, Umur of Aydin. Likewise, the recognition he gives to his loyal and learned daughter, Empress Helene, is insubstantial.

After a significant pause in the historical record, George Sphrantzes[23] took up his pen to describe the final decades of the Byzantine Empire. As a court official and ambassador for both Manuel II and Constantine XI, he witnessed many of the events included in his writings. After fighting alongside Constantine XI in Constantinople in May 1453, Sphrantzes was taken captive by the Turks and later released. Toward the end of his life, he took monastic vows on Kerkyra, adopting the name Gregory. His record, which spans the years 1413–1477, maintains a decidedly anti-Latin perspective throughout. Sphrantzes mentions Empress Helene as well as the wives of John VIII, but (probably due to his frequent absences from the capital) he does not devote much attention to their lives or activities.

A few details from the empire's final years also appear in the work of Doukas.[24] Born at the beginning of the fifteenth century, he entered the service of the powerful Gattilusio[25] family and undertook several diplomatic missions on their behalf. His writings cover the period from 1341 to 1462, only to break off suddenly in the middle of an account of the siege of Mytilene. Doukas was strongly opposed to the Ottoman sultan, whom he depicted as cruel and immoral. He also believed that a union between the Orthodox and Catholic churches was a necessary sacrifice for the preservation of Byzantium. While he rarely mentioned the empresses, it seems he knew Sophia of Montferrat personally, and he composed a detailed description, quite rare in late Byzantine historiography, of the appearance of this unfortunate woman.

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23 For further details, see *Sphrantzes. ODB* III, 1937.

24 For further details, see *Doukas. ODB* I, 656 f.

25 For details, see *ODB* II, 824.

In addition to the chronicles, which present historical events systematically, the so-called *short chronicles* are another source that has proven useful in the study of the late Byzantine empresses. They provide a variety of information in succinct statements, often mentioning where weddings and coronations took place or noting the (monastic) names of the empresses. Occasionally, they also record the dates of imperial funerals and the locations of the empresses' tombs.

Another category of textual sources are *letters,* most of which were written by emperors, patriarchs, court officials, or scholars. The elaborate missives that the scholar, translator, and courtier Demetrios Kydones addressed to Helene Palaiologina[26] offer several interesting details on the family life and scholarly interests of the empress as well as a description of the historical events that accompanied her decision to take the veil. Another body of correspondence, this one penned by Patriarch Athanasios,[27] provides important information on the lives of Eirene-Yolanda and her husband following their separation.

As none of the Palaiologan empresses became a saint of the Orthodox Church, there are no *saints' vitas* describing their lives. Nevertheless, hagiographical accounts do provide some information on these women. The list of miracles inscribed in the *Life of St. Euphrosyne the Younger*[28] claims that both wives of Andronikos II conceived after coming to pray at the saint's tomb and performing other ritual practices necessary to effect a miracle. The *Vita of St. Michael of Chalcedon*[29] reports a failed attempt by Theodora Palaiologina to acquire some of the saint's relics.

Various *official documents* provide further information on the late Byzantine empresses. The *Confession of Faith* signed by Empress Theodora[30] reveals her role in stabilizing the position of the Palaiologan dynasty after the death of her powerful but controversial husband, Michael VIII. Other documents published by the empresses (or their male relatives) reveal the privileges and donations conferred by imperial women on churches and monasteries. In his detailed study, Barišić described and analyzed a number of documents published by the late Byzantine empresses. His primary focus was on codicological information, which can often furnish researchers with important historical details.[31] The *typika,* or monastic rules, issued by Theodora Palaiologina for the nunneries of Lips and Anargyroi reflect not only the quality of life in late Byzantine female monastic communities but also the personality and intentions of the founder.[32] *Praktika* (registers of monastic property and pious bequests to monasteries) offer a secondary source of information on the generosity of imperial consorts and their connections with late Byzantine monastic houses.

26 For further details, see *Kydones.* See Kianka (1996). *ODB* II, 1161.
27 For further details, see *Athanasios. ODB* I, 218 f.
28 For citation, see *Vita S. Euphrosynae.*
29 For citation, see *St. Michel de Chalcédoine.*
30 For details and edition, see Mitsiou (2016).
31 Barišić (1971).
32 Delehaye (1921).

Monodies (speeches dedicated to the deceased, mostly rulers and their family members) represent another, albeit vague, source of information. Frequently written by court officials, clerics, or esteemed scholars, these compositions rarely contain any useful information about the empresses although even ambiguous hints can sometimes be used to confirm scholarly suppositions. Alice-Mary Talbot, for example, made creative use of information included in the monody on Theodora Palaiologina to support the claim that this empress was the mysterious patron of at least some of the *de luxe* manuscripts known as the Palaiologina group.

A few additional sources are worthy of note: the *inscriptions* found in some manuscripts supply vital information on events like coronations and burials. For instance, the inscription in a Gospel Book owned by the Milanese archbishop who later became Pope Alexander V confirms the fact that Empress Maria of Bulgaria, by then the nun Makaria, visited Italy together with John VII in 1392.[33] From time to time, minor details may also be gleaned from *reports* on specific events, such as the *Memoirs of the Council of Ferrara-Florence*, written by Sylvester Syropoulos,[34] who noted the roles of Helene Dragaš and Maria of Trebizond in the events surrounding that council. Another notable source are the *poetries* that noble ladies received or ordered from contemporary poets. The most celebrated poet of the Palaiologan era was Manuel Philes, who wrote a poem lamenting the tragic death of Manuel Palaiologos (killed by his brother's bodyguard). The composition was requested by Manuel's mother, Maria-Rita, who figures in the poem as a mourner.[35] A final source that has been used by researchers to clarify the ritual role of the empresses in the festivities of the Byzantine court are the *ceremonial texts*. Of the available sources, it is the tenth-century work of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos,[36] *De cerimoniis,* and the fourteenth-century treatise of *Pseudo-Kodinos*[37] that capture the widest range of ceremonies as they were performed at the imperial court, including, for example, the welcome ceremonies for an imperial bride, the coronation ceremony, and the wedding ceremony.

02 The state of existing research

Byzantine empresses have inspired a number of historical studies and articles, of which only a few can be mentioned here.[38] The first writer to express an interest in the lives of these women (and that as early as 1893) was Paul Adams, who wrote

33 For details, see Lappa-Zizicas (1976), 139–141. Sophronios Eustratiades (1911), 273 f.
34 For further details, see *Syropoulos. ODB* III, 2001.
35 *Manuelis Philae Carmina* I, 235 f.
36 For citation, see *De cerimoniis.*
37 *ODB* II, 1135.
38 In her book on middle Byzantine empresses, Barbara Hill compiled a detailed outline of the existing scholarship on Byzantine women and empresses. For details, see Hill (1999), 3–8.

a book titled *Princesses byzantines*. This rather romantic work was soon followed by the first scholarly treatise on the subject, *Figures byzantines*[39] (1906), written by Charles Diehl. In a series of entertaining vignettes, Diehl outlined the lives of important Byzantine empresses, including several from the Palaiologan period. Although his research was based on the Greek primary sources, Diehl's colorful presentation of the characters and personalities of these women was perhaps oversimplified and cannot always be accepted as fact.

Despite the popularity of Diehl's work, empresses did not capture the attention of Byzantine scholars for most of the twentieth century. In 1997, Liz James complained that no monograph had yet been written on imperial consorts, which she interpreted as

> [...] a result of the almost unspoken belief that empresses are unique women and so we, as historians, should focus on women who are not exceptional; partly it is a legacy of feminist scholarship which has remained concentrated on the working-class woman above all others, leaving those of us who do not work on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to feel slightly guilty when we study elite women.[40]

In respect to more contemporary research, several important monographs concerning the lives of the early and middle Byzantine empresses have been written in recent years. These include *Empress and Power in Early Byzantium*[41] by Liz James (2001), which presents the various means employed by early Byzantine empresses in acquiring political power and asserts that an empress could secure honor and recognition by preserving traditional virtues, sponsoring pious projects, and performing rituals. An intriguing study by Anne McClanan published in 2002, *Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses: Image and Empire*,[42] focuses primarily on art historical evidence and the various aspects of the presentation of early Byzantine empresses (from the families of Constantine I and Theodosios I). These works have recently been joined by Anja Busch's monograph, titled *Die Frauen der theodosianischen Dynastie: Macht und Repräsentation kaiserlichen Frauen im 5. Jahrhundert*, which endeavors to "investigate the social and symbolic power"[43] of individual imperial women of this era.

Also covering both the early and middle Byzantine periods, Lynda Garland wrote an extensive monograph, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527–1204*[44] (1999), in which she considers the lives of thirteen notable empresses. Dividing these women into three groups – the 'founders' of imperial power, the regents, and the autocrats – she sets their lives and deeds against the backdrop

39 Diehl (1906).
40 James (1997), 123.
41 James (2001).
42 McClanan (2002).
43 Busch (2015), 166.
44 Garland (1999).

of the political and cultural events of the period. *Imperial Women in Byzantium 1025–1204: Power, Patronage and Ideology*,[45] authored by Barbara Hill, is another study on Byzantine empresses that was published in 1999. Focusing mainly on the Komnenian dynasty, the author considers the gender aspect of the power exercised by empresses of the middle period as well as their political strategies and the ideologies they used to facilitate their goals. Soon after these two pioneering works appeared, Judith Herrin published *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium*[46] (2001), in which she describes the lives of three important empresses of the middle period: Eirene the Athenian, Euphrosyne, and Theodora, the wife of Theophilos. Essentially, her work examines how the iconoclast conflict, which created serious division in Byzantine society during the eighth and ninth centuries, framed and partly determined the course of these women's lives.

In addition to the works mentioned so far, there exist any number of articles describing various aspects of the lives of female rulers in Byzantium, so many, in fact, that there is not room enough to list them all here.[47] One of the initial studies, penned by Angeliki Laiou, was "The Role of Women in the Byzantine Society" (1981),[48] which outlined the basic expectations Byzantine society placed on its female members. In 1985, she followed up this study with another groundbreaking work titled "Observations on the Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women,"[49] wherein she made an important contribution to the concept of a 'female world' by recognizing that Byzantine women had consistent long-term roles, norms, and ideologies. Her study utilized the basic areas of modern research as it pertains to Byzantine women, primarily to their familial and monastic roles and the specificities of female patronage.

In respect to the Palaiologan empresses, no comprehensive work has been published to date although several important monographs and articles have been dedicated to this topic. Of these works, only a few will be mentioned here with further references to be found in the biographical and analytical chapters. *Lacinniczki nad Bosforem. Malzen'stwa bizantyn'sko-lacin'skie w cesarskiej rodzinie Paleologow (XIII–XV w.)*,[50] the study by Malgorzata Dabrowska published in 1996, focused mainly on the five Latin princesses who married into the Palaiologan house; however, it also mentioned the non-Latin imperial wives. The author explored the political relations between Byzantium and the West and the cultural aspects of these mixed marriages while paying particular attention to the various

45 Hill (1999).
46 Herrin (2001).
47 Some of these articles will be quoted in relevant passages in the body of the text as well as in the *Bibliography*.
48 Laiou (1981).
49 Laiou (1985).
50 Dabrowska (1996). [Latin Women on the Bosphorus. The Byzantine-Latin Marriages in the Palaiologan Imperial Family (13th–15th c.)].

physical and cultural changes the foreign princesses faced after their arrival in the East. Two years earlier, the British historian Donald Nicol wrote a thin volume containing the biographies of ten prominent Palaiologan women. His detailed yet entertaining narrative, titled *The Byzantine Lady: Ten Portraits, 1250–1500*, included three empresses: Eirene-Yolanda of Montferrat, Eirene Kantakouzene, and Anna of Savoy. While some of Professor Nicol's interpretations of the Byzantine ladies' characters and actions are debatable, his work offered insightful perspectives on the realities of the Palaiologan period not only in the Byzantine Empire but also in the Despotate of Epiros and the Empire of Trebizond. Biographical articles have also been devoted to Empress Theodora, the wife of Michael VIII;[51] Yolanda of Montferrat, the Italian-born second wife of Andronikos II;[52] Anna of Savoy,[53] Helene Dragaš,[54] and her daughter-in-law, Sophia of Montferrat.[55]

Anna of Savoy[56] has clearly received more attention from historians than any other empress. Besides the two biographical sketches mentioned above, Sandra Origone dedicated a monograph called *Giovanna di Savoia, alias Anna Paleologina: latina a Bisanzio (c. 1306–c. 1365)* to this important empress.[57] Her work offered a number of details on Anna's early life in Savoy and corrected and complemented an earlier monograph on the empress penned by Dino Muratore.[58]

03 A note on methodology

Although publications from the area of gender studies provided frequent inspiration, as a historian, my predominant approach to this study has been from the perspective of history. The aim of the present monograph is to inquire into the lives of the late Byzantine imperial consorts and, drawing on their unique experiences, characterize in particular the political, ecclesiastical and ceremonial roles of the empress in the selected time period. In studying Byzantine empresses, scholars have often focused on the most prominent and/or most active imperial consorts, especially on those who (at least for a time) ruled the empire autonomously. While most of the female rulers of the Palaiologan period, excepting Anna of Savoy and, perhaps, Eirene Kantakouzene and Theodora Palaiologina, fall outside these categories, inquiring into a larger number of cases provides not only a

51 Talbot (1992) and (2001). Petit (1916–1919). Petrides (1911).
52 Constantinidi-Bibikou (1950).
53 Malamut (2014A). For further articles, refer to the biographical chapter.
54 Marjanović-Dušanić (2014). Anastasijević (1939).
55 Dabrowska (1996A). Wright (2013).
56 Dölger (1938) and (1961). Muratore (1906) and (1909). Nicol–Bendall (1977). Origone (1999). Anna has also been included in the aforementioned studies by Dabrowska (1996) and Nicol (1996).
57 Origone (1999).
58 Muratore (1906).

more authentic composite image of the lives, both public and private, of the late Byzantine imperial consorts but also new perspectives on various events and characteristics of the Palaiologan era.

04 A brief overview of the history of the empire[59]

Even though not all empresses were actively involved in politics, their lives and destinies were often strongly impacted by internal and external political events as well as religious controversies involving the Orthodox Church. The following summary of the essential historical information related to this period is meant to provide the reader with a general overview.

Born in the ruins of the Roman Empire in the fourth century AD, Byzantium as a political entity inherited its predecessor's administrative and legal systems, which provided the necessary organizational structure for the fledgling empire. Christianity, the new state religion, allowed the numerous ethnicities with their varying cultural contexts to forge a mutual identity. As the generally accepted version has it, the civilization which thus emerged revolved around an Orthodox emperor seated on the throne in Constantinople (sometimes termed the 'new Rome' or, later, the 'new Jerusalem') and an Orthodox patriarch celebrating holy mysteries in the majestic spaces of Hagia Sophia. Greek, the language of the New Testament, was not only the medium of writers and poets but also the *lingua franca* of the Eastern world.

The capital city, Constantinople, was strategically located between Europe and Asia, enabling its rulers to control extensive territories on both continents. The fate of this city was deeply entwined with the fate of the empire, and its significance is underlined by the fact that its seizure by the Ottoman Turks is considered the end of Byzantium. As is often the case in the rise and fall of mighty states, however, the empire's decline was gradual, and what had been a perfect location for a conqueror became the defender's nightmare. Originally multicultural and multilingual, the society of middle and late medieval Byzantium became increasingly monolithic and self-absorbed, focused on survival and the preservation of its cultural and religious heritage.

As far as the middle period of Byzantine history is concerned, both the Great Schism and the Crusades deserve particular attention as both are strongly

59 Numerous primary sources and secondary studies depict the events of the last two centuries of Byzantine history known as the Palaiologan period (1261–1453). While further works will be cited in later chapters, the following studies offer a good overview of this period: Nicol (1972B). Treadgold (1997), for a description of primary sources of the late Byzantine period, see 917–920. Ostrogorsky (1956), 441–596. Norwich (1996), 165–450. Zástěrová *et al.* (1996), 279–337. For the history of the Orthodox Church in the late Byzantine period, see Nicol (1972A) and (1979). Setton (1976), I, 1–84.

reflected in the position and views of the Orthodox Church and the political events of the empire's final centuries. The so-called Great Schism[60] was the result of a rather insignificant conflict[61] between a papal legate, Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida, and Michael I Keroularios, the patriarch of Constantinople, marking the growing rift that eventually gave rise to two separate entities: the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. The fundamental issues were political, a question of Roman primacy, rather than theological in nature. As this ecclesiastic split never really healed, it provided Western rulers with an excellent pretext for refusing Byzantium military support against (mostly) Muslim invaders and supplied the pope with a useful bargaining chip in his negotiations with the Byzantine emperors. The struggle for an uncontaminated Orthodox faith on the one hand and for the preservation of the empire on the other had serious repercussions for Byzantine society, eventually resulting in factions, alienation, and increasing isolation.

Besides the separation of the churches, the mutual distrust of Eastern and Western Europe was further promoted by the Crusades, a series of military campaigns to aid the Christian Orient.[62] When the Seljuk Turks and the Normans attacked the Byzantine Empire in the eleventh century, Alexios I Komnenos requested help from the West. Subsequently, several expeditions took place, but instead of fostering a sense of solidarity, they served to fuel the antipathy between East and West. The Latins perceived the Byzantines as treacherous and inhospitable whereas the Byzantines accused the Crusaders of looting and burning. The crisis culminated in the massacre of the Latins in Constantinople in 1182[63] and, soon afterwards, in the sad events of the Fourth Crusade (1204).[64] The Latin lords created the so-called Latin Empire along with a number of Latin principalities in central and eastern Greece while the Byzantine nobility formed three exile states: the Nicene Empire in western Anatolia,[65] the Despotate of Epiros[66] in western Greece,

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60 For a comprehensive account of the history of the Schism and its development into the twelfth century, see (for example) Runciman (1953).

61 In a recent study, Tia M. Kolbaba claims that "all in all, 'the schism of 1054' should not be called a schism at all; it was a quarrel between the legates and the patriarch, leading to excommunications and recriminations which neither side applied to all members of the other side and both sides were willing to forget rather soon thereafter." Kolbaba (2010), 114–130.

62 Due to the popularity of the topic, the number of books and studies dealing with the Crusades is overwhelming. To mention a few standard works: see Runciman (1951–1954). Harris (2003). Lilie (1981). For a brief overview, see also *ODB* I, 557–560. Kazhdan (2001). Kolbaba (2000).

63 For the roots of the estrangement between the Byzantines and the Latins, see (for example) Angold (1999).

64 See Angold (2003). Bartlett (2000). Nicol (1996B). Madden (2008).

65 Nicol (1972B), 23–44. See also Mitsiou (2006).

66 Zástěrová *et al.* (1996), 289–291.

and the Komnenian Empire of Trebizond[67] on the Black Sea coast.[68] Of these, it was the Nicene Empire that gradually acquired the dominant position and became the residence of an Orthodox patriarch, who crowned Theodore (I) Laskaris emperor-in-exile in 1208.

This first Theodore's grandson, Theodore II Laskaris, died when his heir was only seven years old, and Michael Palaiologos, one of Theodore's generals, became co-emperor with the young John IV, the last ruler of the Laskarid dynasty, in 1259. Michael was a shrewd and able leader but not immune to the temptations of power. He effectively destroyed the joint forces of Epiros, Achaia, and Sicily in the Battle of Pelagonia (1259) and systematically made treaties with his neighbors – the Seljuk Turks, the Mongols, the Bulgarians, and the Republic of Genoa – in order to secure peace for the conquest of the ancient capital of his people. Having achieved this goal with unexpected ease by 1261, Michael decided there was room for only one emperor on the throne in Constantinople. He had the Laskarid prince blinded and left him behind in Asia Minor. Michael's ascent to the throne inaugurated a new imperial dynasty (see Tab. 2), which would also be the last dynasty to rule the Byzantine Empire.

The wounds of 1204 were not easily healed. Although the Byzantines from Nicea re-established control over the former capital city, it took several decades before they regained some of the territories held by the Greek and Latin nobility. The Despotate of Epiros had an especially dramatic fate. For a time, it was reincluded among the territories of the empire with its various parts being held on occasion by Serbia, Venice, and Bulgaria before it was finally conquered by the Ottomans. The Empire of Trebizond, on the other hand, was never reunited to Palaiologan Byzantium, which it briefly survived.

At the beginning of his reign, Michael VIII[69] faced the tremendous task of reconstructing the empire and rebuilding the navy. In order to proceed, he started the long process of devaluating the *nomisma*, which negatively impacted the Byzantine economy and increased the importance of Italian coinage in international trade. Reconstruction was further hindered by the continuing internal division of the empire between partisans of the Palaiologan and Laskarid dynasties. Michael's cruel treatment of John IV and his sisters scandalized supporters of the former imperial family, especially Patriarch Arsenios, who expressed his displeasure by excommunicating the emperor. In response, Michael found a new patriarch, Joseph (I) of Galesion, who lifted the excommunication. The change on

67 *Ibid.*, 291–294.
68 Nicol (1972B), 1–22. For a very interesting study of the development of Greek identity in the last centuries of the empire, see Page (2008). See also Setton (1976–1981). Gill (1979).
69 For a detailed study of Michael and his Western politics, see Geanakoplos (1973). Nicol (1972B), 45–78.

the patriarchal throne resulted in yet another controversy, known as the Arsenite schism.[70]

Despite the successful reconquest of Constantinople, the external situation of the empire remained turbulent. Besides struggles with the pro-Laskarid Bulgarians as well as the Mongols and the Despotate of Epiros, the emperor had to defend his territories from Western rulers unwilling to renounce their claims on the lands of the former Latin Empire and a pope who was eager to reunite the churches.

Ultimately, the Union of the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church was celebrated in Lyons on July 6, 1274.[71] Although this meant that the pope was no longer able to sanction a crusade against Byzantium, the issue sharply divided Byzantine society and Michael remained trapped between opposing ideologies. When Pope Nicholas III died in 1280, Charles I of Anjou, the king of Sicily and the leader of an anti-Byzantine coalition, immediately set in motion his plans for reconquering the Latin Empire by launching an army (aided by the allied despots of Thessaly and Epiros) against Constantinople. Michael hastily dispatched his ablest generals to meet the invaders, and their defense proved successful. This setback did not deter an enemy as determined as Charles, however. He soon secured the election of a French pope, Martin IV, who excommunicated Michael and gave Charles a free hand in organizing another crusade.

Once again, Byzantium faced pending disaster. Although the emperor's diplomacy was conducted in secret, there is some evidence to indicate that he played a role in the event known as the Sicilian Vespers in 1282.[72] Shortly before Charles set out to conquer Byzantium, the overtaxed Sicilians, assisted by Peter III of Aragon,[73] rebelled against, slew, or evicted the French soldiers stationed on the island and destroyed the fleet already assembled in Messina. Having saved Byzantium yet again, thwarting Charles and humiliating the pope in the process, Michael's rule had reached its zenith. He died soon afterwards on a military campaign in Thessaly in December 1282. Despite his undeniable political successes, the policy of *rapprochement* with the pope and the blinding of the Laskarid heir estranged Michael from many of his subjects (not to mention the Orthodox Church, to which he was never reconciled). Perhaps his only praise was written later by the historian Nikephoros Gregoras: "The empire would easily have fallen under the domination

70 For a succinct summary of the controversy as well as further literature, see Tinnefeld (2012). Tudorie (2011).

71 For details, see (for example) Nicol (1961), 454–480.

72 See Treadgold (1997), 734–744. Geanakoplos gives evidence of contacts between Michael and Peter III of Aragon. See Geanakoplos (1973), 346–358. For a more detailed study of the Sicilian Vespers, including Michael's contacts with other parties engaged in the event, see *ibid.*, ch. 14, 335–367.

73 Peter III of Aragon was a son-in-law of Manfred, the previous king of Sicily. In avenging his kinsman, Peter had an excellent pretext to reclaim the island from Charles of Anjou.

of Charles, King of Italy [*sic*] had such an emperor not been at the helm of the Greek affairs."[74]

The first political decision of Michael's oldest surviving son, Andronikos II Palaiologos,[75] was to cancel the Union of Lyons and re-establish Orthodoxy. The exiled and the persecuted were called back, the great Church of Hagia Sophia was purified, and the Unionist patriarch, John Bekkos, was imprisoned. The aged Patriarch Joseph regained his former position, a fact that aggravated the Arsenites, who had hoped for a leader from among their own numbers. When Joseph died a year later in 1283, the emperor nominated Gregory II Kyprios to the vacated see. Under his rule, the Arsenite issue became increasingly complex, and in 1284, Andronikos II paid for a synod to convene in Adramyttion in the hope of ending the Arsenite schism. The presence of a number of the persecuted and mutilated followers of Arsenios caused past wounds to resurface, however, and the strife continued. To placate the Arsenites, the emperor gave one of their leaders, Hyakinthos, the monastery of Mosele, which subsequently became the center of the Arsenite opposition.

In 1289, the emperor selected a new patriarch, Athanasios I. Athanasios was an upright man who was more concerned with social justice than with theological arguments. He confiscated the surpluses of the monasteries in order to feed the poor, sent home members of the permanent synod to take care of their dioceses, and even went so far as to denounce the avarice of his own priests. Needless to say, he soon lost the support of everyone except the poor. It was only under his successor, Niphon, that the Arsenite schism finally ended. A plot uncovered in the Mosele Monastery sent many Arsenites to prison, and the patriarch, acting as a good diplomat, found a way to reconcile them to the Orthodox Church without losing face. In addition to subduing the Arsenites, Niphon took the Holy Mountain of Athos under direct patriarchal authority. This important step encouraged development in the area, increasing its significance.

Recognizing the need to economize, Andronikos disbanded the navy (leaving the empire at the mercy of the Venetians and the Genoese), greatly reduced the army, and further devaluated the currency. The richest members of Byzantine society, the landowners and the monasteries, kept their privileges and properties while often using dependent peasants as a source of funds to pay their increased taxes. As Turkish incursions into the empire's Asian territories continued, there was a considerable influx of refugees, swelling the numbers of the poor in the larger cities.

By this time, Byzantium was almost entirely dependent on Italian shipments of food and other basic necessities, a situation that both Genoa and Venice intended to exploit. In the absence of a Byzantine fleet, their monopolies enabled them to

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74 *Gregoras* I, 144. (V,6).
75 Nicol (1972B), 99–159. For insight into Andronikos's politics and reign, see also Laiou (1972).

keep the emperor in check while adventurers of Italian origin made themselves the masters of several Greek islands, including Chios, Lesbos, and Tenedos.[76] At the same time, northern Greece gradually fell under the control of an expanding Serbia. In order to secure his borders peacefully, the emperor offered the Serbian king the hand of his five-year-old daughter, who brought her husband the territory he had conquered as her dowry. On the eastern frontier, the Osmanli Turks began raids into Bithynia, and Andronikos employed the Alans and, later, the Catalan Company to stop their progress. After a few minor victories, these mercenaries turned back on Byzantium, causing considerable damage and finally seizing the French Duchy of Athens and Thebes, which they held until 1388. In the meantime, the Turks continued to settle in Asia Minor, creating several emirates.

The situation within the Palaiologan family mirrored the turmoil at the empire's borders. Andronikos II married Anna of Hungary by whom he had Michael, later known as Michael IX, and another son, Constantine the Porphyrogennetos. By his second wife, Eirene-Yolanda of Montferrat, he had three sons and a daughter. Michael IX, who predeceased his father, had four children: Andronikos (the future Andronikos III), Manuel, and two daughters. Empress Eirene resented the fact that her stepchildren were to have precedence over her own sons, and the issue divided the imperial family. Moreover, in 1321 Andronikos III led the young noblemen who supported him in a rebellion against his grandfather, and the country was soon engaged in a civil war, known as the First Civil War, that was to last for seven years. In 1328, Andronikos III entered Constantinople, and his grandfather abdicated and retired to a monastery.

Despite the toll taken by war, the reign of Andronikos III[77] (1328–1341) was constructive in many ways. On the European side, he made peace with the Bulgarians (1329) and Serbians (1334) and reconquered Thessaly (1333) and Epiros (1340). In Asia Minor, he agreed to pay an annual tribute to the Osmanlis for the remaining Byzantine cities and lands in Bithynia. The emperor also rebuilt the navy, regained the islands of Chios and Lesbos, and won over the emirs of Saruchan and Aydin as allies against the Genoese and the Ottoman Turks. Andronikos III was also active in domestic affairs. He reformed the courts, and it was under his rule that two influential treatises on law, the *Syntagma* of Matthew Blastares and the *Hexabiblos* of Constantine Harmenopoulos, were compiled. Unfortunately, these promising developments were cut short by the emperor's untimely death on the night of June 14–15, 1341.

Because John V was still too young to rule, the empress (Anna of Savoy), Patriarch John XIV Kalekas, and a loyal friend of the late emperor, John Kantakouzenos, formed a regency. Their government was influenced by Alexios Apokaukos, a former protégé of Kantakouzenos, who used cunning and intrigue

76 For a more complete account of the dealings of Byzantium, Venice, and Genoa, see Nicol (1972B), 117–120.
77 Nicol (1972B), 159–191.

to turn the empress and the patriarch against his former benefactor. The ensuing conflict resulted in a protracted civil war (the Second Civil War),[78] which decimated the population and drained the treasury as the rulers of Serbia, Bulgaria, and the Turkish emirates became increasingly involved in the affairs of the empire. Byzantine society was split in two: the nobility sided with Kantakouzenos while the lower classes supported the Palaiologan dynasty. In May 1346, Kantakouzenos was crowned in Adrianople, and he entered Constantinople in February of the following year. He made peace with the empress, agreeing to rule together with John V, who became his son-in-law.

In the course of the Second Civil War, another religious controversy convulsed the empire. It originated with a group of Athonite monks, who revived the practice of *hesychia*, seeking spiritual development through the Jesus prayer, meditation, frequent Communion, and controlled breathing. These practices, combined with a certain disdain for secular education, brought the monks substantial opposition from theologians and scholars in the capital. The hesychasts,[79] as they came to be known, were represented by Gregory Palamas. The opposing party had several leaders in succession: Barlaam of Calabria, Gregory Akindynos and the historian Nikephoros Gregoras. As politics and religion were notoriously intertwined in the Byzantine Empire, Palamas became a supporter of Kantakouzenos while the patriarch and Empress Anna joined the opposition. Kantakouzenos's eventual political victory influenced the outcome of the hesychast controversy: the patriarch was deposed in 1347 and Palamas was proclaimed Orthodox (and, after his death, a saint).

John VI[80] faced a number of difficulties in the course of his reign. In the first year, the plague swept over the country, and soon afterwards, Byzantium became embroiled in a war against the Genoese. In 1348, Nikephoros Gregoras, supported by several important bishops, reopened the hesychast controversy, but his hopes were disappointed when a synod recognized Palamas as Orthodox for the third time (1351). Following the earthquake of 1354, the Turks initiated a massive expansion to the European coast and rebuilt the strategic stronghold of Gallipolis. Eventually, John V forced his father-in-law to abdicate and enter a monastery, there to spend the rest of his life as a monk, writing his memoirs and occasionally politically supporting John V. John VI Kantakouzenos died at an advanced age in 1383.

John V Palaiologos[81] inherited an empire beset with problems that were beyond his ability to solve. Stephan Uroš IV Dušan, the ruler of Serbia, came close to materializing the Slavic dream of making Constantinople a Slavic-Greek capital before his death in December 1355. In the same year, John attempted to win allies by giving Lesbos to Francesco Gattilusio and Chios to the Genoese. He also coveted

78 Second Civil War, 1341–1347. Zástěrová *et al.* (1996), 318 f.
79 For a brief overview, see Zástěrová *et al.* (1996), 319 f.
80 Nicol (1972B), 191–265. Nicol (1996).
81 Nicol (1972B), 265–310.

an alliance with the pope; however, although numerous legates were exchanged, nothing was ever accomplished except John's personal conversion to Catholicism. The Turks continued their inexorable conquest, reaching Didymoteichon by 1362, and in the 1370s, John had to make a treaty with the Osmanlis, agreeing to participate in their military ventures. By 1377, the strategic strongholds of Gallipolis and Adrianople were under Turkish control, marking the beginning of the isolation of Constantinople. Civil war had become a way of life for the Palaiologan family, and John was forced to take arms against his rebellious son, Andronikos IV, several times. Andronikos IV (along with his son, John VII) was later blinded and formally disinherited (1373), and John V's second son, Manuel, became co-emperor instead.

In the meantime, the Turkish conquest reached its zenith in the victory over Serbian and Bosnian troops at Kosovo (1389). Sultan Murad died in the battle, but his son Bayezid stood ready to take his place. He made Serbia a vassal kingdom and put the Athos monasteries under his jurisdiction. At the same time, he united Asia Minor by dismissing the leading emirs of Aydin, Saruchan, and Menteshe and kept Byzantium divided by playing the members of the imperial family against one another. For a time, he supported John VII and blackmailed the emperor by threatening to blind and imprison Manuel. It was during this time that John V died in 1391.

Manuel II[82] was an intelligent man, both ruler and philosopher; however, the ongoing Turkish conquest as well as conflict with his nephew, John VII, cast a shadow over his reign. Gradually, the empire was becoming an island within Ottoman territory. In 1393, Bulgaria became the first Turkish *pashalik* (a province governed by a pasha) in Europe. A year later, Bayezid initiated an eight-year siege of Constantinople and went on to crush the last Western alliance at Nikopolis in 1396. The existence of that coalition had given Manuel hope, however, and he traveled west seeking aid in 1399. Although he was welcomed in Italy, France, and England, he received no substantial promises. In the end, help came from an unexpected source.

In the 1390s, Timur Lenk (Tamerlane) and his armies had crossed from the Far East into western Asia and, after taking Georgia and Armenia, they challenged the power of the Ottomans. The sultan quickly abandoned the siege of Constantinople, turning his attention to this new threat. Nonetheless, his army was utterly destroyed in a battle fought near Ankara in July 1402. Bayezid himself was taken captive and died the following year. Timur Lenk re-established the former non-Ottoman emirates in Asia Minor and managed to set the four sons of the deceased sultan against one another. Despite these successes, his power in western Asia was as short-lived as his appearance there, for the legendary fighter soon died on his way to conquer China. The immediate danger to the Byzantine Empire had passed.

In Manuel's absence, John VII made a treaty with Suleiman, Bayezid's heir in Rumelia. The terms were favorable to the Byzantines and included the cancellation

82 Nicol (1972B), 310–334. Barker (1969).

of tribute and the return of Thessalonike, Mount Athos, and other territories to the empire. When Manuel II returned late in the spring of 1403, he continued the policy of amicable relations with the Ottomans, supporting the ascension of Mehmed I to the throne. Although the two rulers remained on friendly terms, Manuel felt it was necessary to repair the Hexamilion wall to protect the Morea. He also held the sultan's opponents as prisoners, refusing to hand them over.

When Mehmed I died in May 1421, he was succeeded by his son, Murad II. In the same year, Manuel II suffered a stroke and was unable to govern the empire for some time. While John VIII was governing in his father's place, he decided to release a relative of the sultan from prison. The unfortunate man was soon caught and killed, but the incident had angered Murad, who retaliated by besieging Constantinople, prolonging the blockade of Thessalonike, and launching an attack on the Morea. The situation in Thessalonike became critical, and the governor offered the city to Venice. The republic accepted but was unable to break the Turkish blockade. In the meantime, the empire had shrunk to encompass the city of Constantinople and its environs, for which the emperor had to pay 100,000 ducats as tribute to the sultanate. In 1425, Emperor Manuel died at the advanced age of seventy-five, deeply mourned by his subjects.

John VIII[83] (1425–1448) had five brothers, all of whom had inherited the unfortunate Palaiologan propensity for quarreling over power. With Constantinople and Thessalonike often besieged or preparing for a blockade, the only part of the empire that did not fall into stagnation was the Morea. Late Palaiologan Mistra became a great center of learning and art. Scholars like George Gemisthos Plethon, Isidore (later bishop of Kiev), the future Cardinal Bessarion, and Gennadios Scholarios (a future patriarch) all studied or taught there. Despite its relative prosperity, the Morea had its problems: too many princes resided there, and the local landlords mostly quarreled with them instead of joining them in mounting an effective defense against the Ottomans. From this point on, the decline of the empire progressed with fatal speed. In 1430, the Turks conquered Thessalonike. The city was captured and plundered but soon rebuilt by the sultan, who bought many of the city's important citizens out of slavery and even restored their property. In the same year, a strategic Epirote city named Ioannina capitulated and was granted significant privileges within the Ottoman Empire.

In the West, the situation of the Catholic Church seemed to play into the hands of the emperor. By challenging the power of the pope, the conciliarist movement had led the two opposing parties to compete for the support of the Constantinopolitan patriarch. The Byzantines, however, failed to capitalize on the situation. They joined the papal council (called to Ferrara in 1438 and moved to Florence the following year), but the outcome was disappointing. Instead of offering assistance to the beleaguered empire, the pope insisted that the patriarch

83 Nicol (1972B), 357–390.

recognize his supremacy while learned theologians spent months trying to prove that the Holy Spirit proceeds from Father and Son rather than from the Father alone. Although another union was signed on July 5, 1439, its results were negligible. Back in Byzantium, it was immediately rejected by the Orthodox clergy and the common people alike while some members of the Unionist intellectual elite decided to relocate to the West, mainly to Italy.

In the meantime, Murad II continued his conquest of Eastern Europe. Belgrade surrendered in 1440. A year later, the Turks entered Transylvania, and the crusade organized by Władysław III of Poland, General Hunyadi, and Cardinal Caesarini was crushed by the Ottoman army at Varna in November 1444. Byzantium found itself completely cut off. In December 1446, the sultan's troops got past the Hexamilion, and the rulers of the Morea (Constantine and Thomas) became Ottoman vassals. In October 1448, John VIII died, having appointed his brother Constantine XI[84] his successor. Constantine's mother, Helene Dragaš, prevented her younger sons from claiming the imperial title and persuaded them to accept the rank of despot and a share of the Morea. The last Byzantine emperor, Constantine XI Dragaš,[85] was not crowned in Constantinople but in Mistra in January 1449. Soon after he entered the capital, the city was divided by the pope's insistence on a proper honoring of the Union of Florence. Despite numerous protests on the part of the Orthodox clergy, a festive celebration of the Orthodox and Catholic liturgy took place in Hagia Sophia in December 1452, bringing further bitterness and humiliation to the Byzantine people.

After Murad's death in 1451, his son Mehmed II became sultan in his place. A learned, capable, ambitious young man whose dream was to make the city on the Bosphorus his capital, Mehmed commanded his troops to besiege Constantinople in the winter of 1451. As the blockade continued, growing hunger and fear among the city's inhabitants prompted a continuous exodus. In May 1453, the Byzantines still refused to surrender, and the sultan promised his soldiers three days of plunder when Constantinople was taken. The Byzantine capital was conquered on Tuesday, May 29, 1453, and the emperor died in the fighting. Sacked and plundered, the city 'ran with blood,' and many aristocrats were among the slain. After his triumphant entry, Mehmed entered Hagia Sophia, which was destined to become a mosque, to pray. In January 1454, Gennadios Scholarios was ordained patriarch of Constantinople, becoming the religious leader of the sultan's Christian subjects.

Hopes for continued prosperity under Ottoman rule, so cherished by the cities of Italy, were severely disappointed. The Genoese had to pull down the walls and fortifications of Pera (Galata) and pay a tax for every male inhabitant. The tribute

84 For the various contemporary descriptions of the capture of Constantinople, see (for example) Runciman (1965). Nicol (1994) and (1979). For details on the reign and personality of Constantine XI, see Nicol (1992). Mijatovich (1968).

85 Nicol (1972B), 390–438.

they paid for their colonies increased while the safety of their sea routes deteriorated. Gradually, the Turks captured Chios, Naxos, and Negroponte. In the Morea, Demetrios and Thomas Palaiologos continued their struggle for power. Mistra was occupied in May 1460, and Thomas escaped to Corfu. He later sailed to Italy where he received support from the pope and from the city of Venice. Demetrios went to the sultan and enjoyed his favor for a short time. When he lost it, he became a monk and died in a monastery. The Palaiologan family line continued through Thomas's children. The final Byzantine center of power, the Komnenian Empire of Trebizond, fell to the Turks in August 1461.

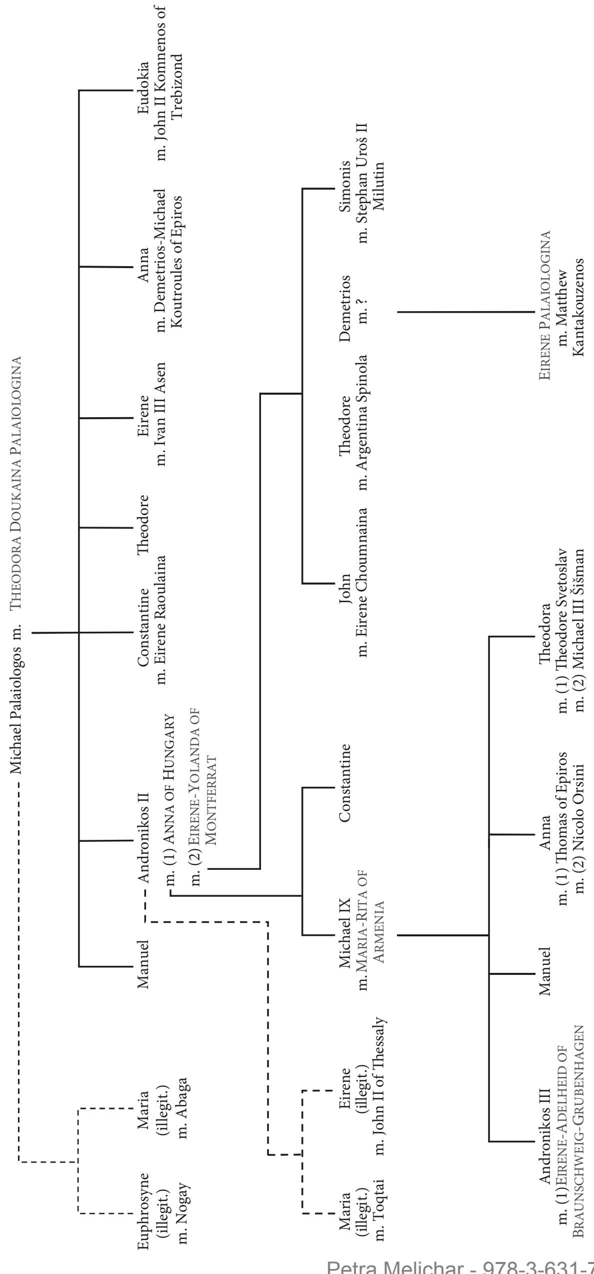
05 Anna, Eirene, Maria and Helene – but which one?

Late Byzantine empresses often used the same first names, and when they married, they adopted the surnames of their husbands. Consequently, they appear on seals and documents as Anna Palaiologina (Anna of Hungary, Anna of Savoy, and Anna of Moscow), Maria Palaiologina (Maria-Rita of Armenia, Maria of Bulgaria, and Maria of Trebizond), or Eirene Palaiologina (Eirene-Yolanda of Montferrat, Eirene of Braunschweig-Grubenhagen, Eirene Palaiologina, and Eirene Gattilusio). In order to distinguish among them, they appear (outside their biographical chapters and for the purposes of this study) under the following names (see Tab. 1)

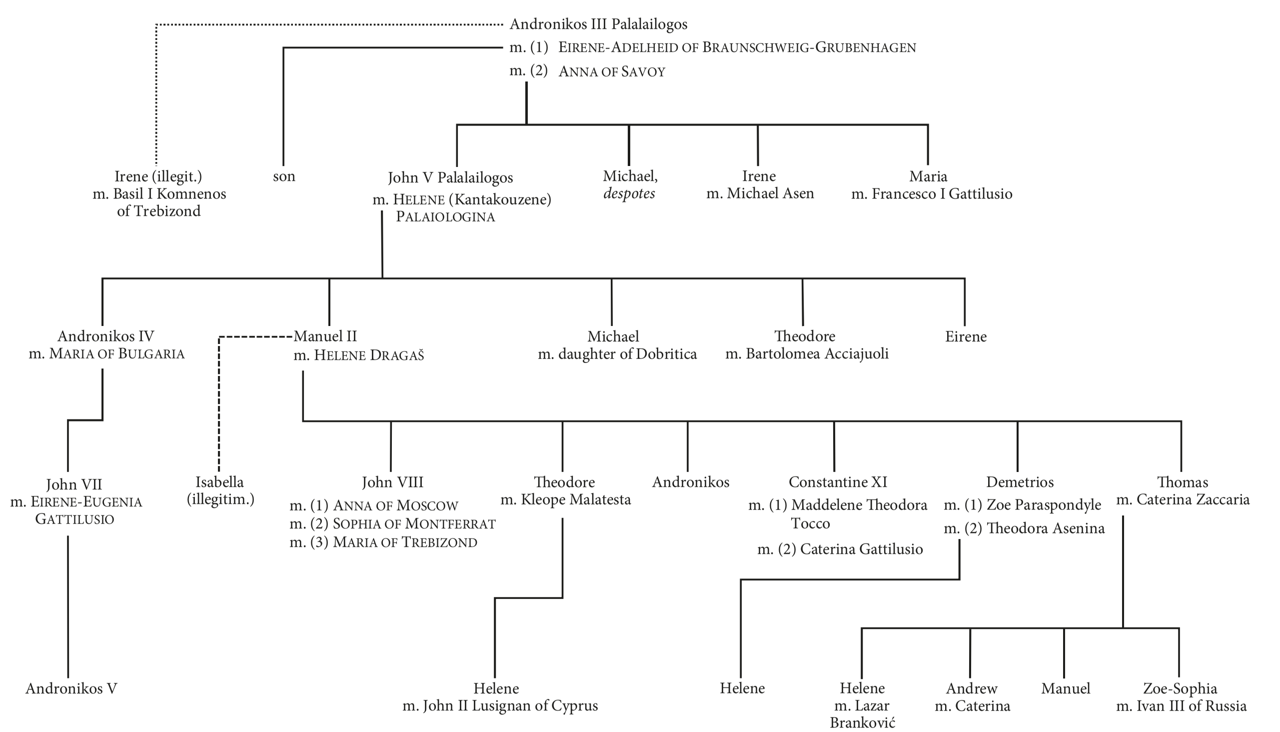
Tab. 1: *List of the names under which individual empresses mostly appear in the sources (Petra Melichar)*

Name used in this study	Husband	Alternative name (PLP)
Theodora Palaiologina	Michael VIII	Theodora Doukaina Komnene Palaiologina (monastic) Eugenia
Anna of Hungary	Andronikos II	Anna Palaiologina
Eirene-Yolanda (of Montferrat)	Andronikos II	Yolanda of Montferrat Eirene Palaiologina
Maria-Rita (of Armenia)	Michael IX	Rita (Maria) of Armenia Maria Palaiologina (monastic) Xene
Eirene-Adelheid (of Braunschweig-Grubenhagen)	Andronikos III	Adelheid von Braunschweig-Grubenhagen Eirene Palaiologina
Anna of Savoy	Andronikos III	Johanna of Savoy Anna Palaiologina (monastic) Anastasia

Name used in this study	Husband	Alternative name (PLP)
Eirene Kantakouzene	John VI	Eirene Asenina Palaiologina (monastic) Eugenia
Helene Palaiologina	John V	Helene Kantakouzene (monastic) Hypomone
Eirene Palaiologina	Matthew I	Eirene Kantakouzene
Maria of Bulgaria	Andronikos IV	Keraca of Bulgaria Maria Palaiologina (monastic) Makaria
Eirene Gattilusio	John VII	Eirene Palaiologina (monastic) Eugenia
Helene Dragaš	Manuel II	Helene Palaiologina Helene Kantakouzene (monastic) Hypomone
Anna of Moscow	John VIII	Anna Palaiologina
Sophia of Montferrat	John VIII	Sophia Palaiologina
Maria of Trebizond	John VIII	Maria Komnene Kantakouzene Palaiologina



Tab. 2: *A Selected Genealogy of the Palaiologos Family (Based on ODB III, 1558 f.)*



Andronikos III Palalailogos
m. (1) Eirene-Adelheid of Braunschweig-Grubenhagen
m. (2) Anna of Savoy
Irene (illegit.) m. Basil I Komnenos of Trebizond
son
John V Palalailogos m. Helene (Kantakouzene) Palaiologina
Michael, despotes
Irene m. Michael Asen
Maria m. Francesco I Gattilusio
Andronikos IV m. Maria of Bulgaria
Manuel II m. Helene Dragaš
Michael m. daughter of Dobritica
Theodore m. Bartolomea Acciajuoli
Eirene
John VII m. Eirene-Eugenia Gattilusio
Isabella (illegitim.)
John VIII m. (1) Anna of Moscow m. (2) Sophia of Montferrat m. (3) Maria of Trebizond
Theodore m. Kleope Malatesta
Andronikos
Constantine XI m. (1) Maddelene Theodora Tocco m. (2) Caterina Gattilusio
Demetrios m. (1) Zoe Paraspondyle m. (2) Theodora Asenina
Thomas m. Caterina Zaccaria
Andronikos V
Helene m. John II Lusignan of Cyprus
Helene
Helene m. Lazar Branković
Andrew m. Caterina
Manuel
Zoe-Sophia m. Ivan III of Russia

Part 1: The Lives

I Theodora Doukaina Palaiologina: Mother of the Palaiologan Dynasty (1259–1303)[86]

In all respects I want to follow the church of God,
hold on to her and in that way acquire my own salvation.
I wish to make my piety apparent and known to all;
I received it from heaven through the Fathers,
I have kept it growing until the present time,
and I will hold on to it until the end with the help of God (…).[87]

The Golden Bull of Theodora Palaiologina

Introduction

When Theodora Palaiologina signed these words at the Council of Blacherns in 1283, she was entering a new season of her life. Her husband, Michael VIII, had died, and she hoped to stabilize the position of her eldest son by establishing her Orthodoxy beyond all doubt. Behind her lay the forty years during which she had risen from her position as a relatively unimportant relative of the imperial family to the rank of empress, the first empress of the Palaiologan dynasty. To understand the story of her life, we must delve further into the history of the Byzantine Empire.

Following the dramatic events of the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204, Theodore I Laskaris,[88] a son-in-law of Emperor Alexios III Angelos, escaped with his wife from Constantinople to Asia Minor, where they settled in the city of Nicea. A capable organizer and warrior, he soon gathered a following from among the Greek immigrants in the area and gradually established a strong principality in northwestern Asia Minor, which later came to be known as the Empire of Nicea.[89] After it became clear that Constantinople would not be reconquered immediately

86 For the late Byzantine empresses, the year of birth is often unknown; therefore, the dates in parentheses indicate inaugurations (or, in two cases, weddings to the imperial heir) and the year of death.
87 Translation mine.
88 *ODB* III, 2039 f.
89 Zástěrová *et al.* (1996), 284–289. Nicol (1972B), 23–44. For economic relations, see Mitsiou (2006). For an interesting interpretation and perception of the Nicene Empire, see Ahrweiler (1975). For interactions between the Nicene Empire and Western European states, see Karpov (1981).

and that neither his brother nor his father-in-law would sit on the throne in the Great Palace there, Theodore decided to formally secure the foundations of a new state. When the former patriarch of Constantinople, John X Kamateros, died in 1206, Theodore appointed Michael IV Autoreianos the new Orthodox patriarch. In March 1208, Michael crowned Theodore emperor.[90] Having successfully established a rump state to guard the legacy of the Byzantine Empire, Theodore died in November 1221 and was succeeded by his son-in-law, John III Batatzes.

It was during the reign of John III that Theodora Doukaina Komnene Palaiologina[91] was born in Nicea around 1240.[92] Bearing the names of several prominent Byzantine families, she was the only child of *sebastokrator* John Doukas Batatzes (the nephew of Emperor John III Batatzes) and his wife Eudokia.[93] Theodora's father died prematurely, and his wife never remarried.[94] Perhaps it was the shared loss that strengthened the bond between Theodora and her mother, who remained close throughout their lives. After the reconquest of Constantinople, Eudokia followed Theodora to the ancient capital[95] and later generously endowed the empress's foundation of Lips.[96] According to the *typikon*,[97] the two women were buried there close to one another.[98]

Theodora's rise to the Nicene throne was unexpected and rather dramatic. The Laskarid dynasty was firmly established, and its princes mostly married foreign-born princesses in the hope of securing the borders and gaining useful military alliances. During Theodora's early years, her great-uncle, John III Batatzes (1221–1254),[99] ruled the empire. He was an able administrator and a determined military leader, who further stabilized the position of his realm and regained important territories on the European continent. Gradually, he forced the Latins to withdraw from northwestern Asia Minor and, in 1234, acquired a permanent foothold in Thrace. After the death of his Bulgarian ally, Tsar John Asen II, John III enlarged the Byzantine territories in the southern Balkans and added the city of

90 Theodore had been acclaimed emperor by members of the Byzantine nobility and leaders of the army three years earlier in 1205.

91 On Theodora, see Talbot (1992) (reprint. Talbot (2001B)) and the works cited in this chapter. For an overview of the sources and literature, consult *PLP*, n. 21380.

92 See, for example, Polemis (1968), 109, n. 74.

93 Eudokia was the daughter of John Angelos, a member of the imperial family that ruled Byzantium from 1185 to 1204. For detailed family trees of both Eudokia and John Doukas Batatzes, see Failler (1982), 190 f. See also Papadopoulos (1938), 3.

94 *Akropolites* I, 101 (51), 268 (79). Skoutariotes borrows this passage almost verbatim (*Skoutariotes*, 504).

95 *Pachymeres* I, 217 (II,31).

96 *Delehaye, Typica*, 132 f., n. 48. For an excellent introduction into foundation and re-foundation in Byzantium, see Mullett (2007).

97 For an introduction into the genre of monastic rules, *typika*, see Mullett (2007B).

98 *Delehaye*, *Typica*, 130, n. 42.

99 *ODB* II, 1047 f.

Thessalonike to his domain (1236). In 1242, he persuaded John Doukas, the son of his Epirote adversary Theodore, to give up his imperial claims and accept the title of despot. Around the same time, the propitious arrival of the Mongols and their destruction of the Seljuq Sultanate rid Nicea of a dangerous neighbor to the east.

‘A man of secret designs’[100]

Soon after these events, the Palaiologan family began its rise to prominence. In 1246, John III appointed Andronikos Palaiologos governor of Thessalonike and made his son Michael[101] responsible for Macedonia. A good judge of character, the emperor was well aware of Michael’s ambition. In 1253, for reasons the sources do not specify, Michael was accused of high treason; nevertheless, he made his way to the Nicene court and used his skills as a capable diplomat and negotiator to reconcile himself to John III.

Despite his misgivings regarding Michael’s aspirations, the emperor had several reasons to give him another chance. The young nobleman was an accomplished military leader, one of the representatives of the aristocracy, and distant kin. To secure Michael’s loyalty and prevent his forming an alliance with a member of the opposition,[102] the emperor decided to marry Michael into the imperial family. The chronicler states that John had originally intended Michael for his granddaughter Eirene;[103] in the end, he probably did not consider it prudent to bring the ruthless general so close to the throne. Instead, he bound Michael by numerous vows of fidelity and married him to his great-niece, Theodora Doukaina.[104] The marriage was one of political convenience. In his writings, Michael Palaiologos later noted, “[John III Doukas Batatzes] wanted to bind me to himself by all possible means: he became my father-in-law by giving me in marriage his niece, whom he loved as his own daughter. He made her the mother of my children, the mother of emperors.”[105] Though a capable soldier, tactician and politician, the bridegroom was no fairy-tale prince. Both John III and Theodore II doubted his loyalty, and the historian

100 *Pachymeres* I, 37 (I,7).

101 *PLP*, n. 21528. See also *Ephraim*, v. 8869. For a detailed study on Michael and his Western politics, see Geanakoplos (1959). Zástěrová *et al.* (1996), 288–304. Nicol (1972B), 45–78.

102 Pachymeres mentions Michael’s plan (real or alleged) to marry the daughter of Michael II Komnenos Doukas also known as Michael Angelos of Epiros (*Pachymeres* I, 37 (I,7)).

103 *Skoutariotes*, 504.

104 *Akropolites* I, 101 (51). It is not certain whether the wedding took place in 1253 or the following year. Papadopoulos, Nicol and Sideras prefer the earlier date. Nicol highlights Theodore’s mistrust towards Palaiologos and claims that the new emperor would not have consented to this marriage (Papadopoulos (1938), 3, n. 1. Nicol (1972B), 34. Sideras (1982 reprint. 1994), 263).

105 *Michael Palaiologos*, 451.

Pachymeres described him as "a man of secret designs ready, given the opportunity, to rebel."[106] John III Batatzes, the greatest emperor of Nicea, died in 1254 soon after Theodora's betrothal or marriage. He left the empire to his son Theodore.

Theodore II Laskaris (1254–1258)[107] was a man of scholarly interests who did not possess the political abilities of his father. Though he managed to check the military incursions of the Bulgarian tsar and the Epirote despot on his European territories, he failed to remain on good terms with the Nicene nobility, becoming progressively more suspicious of the aristocracy over time. To reduce the possibility of a *coup d'état*, Theodore chose his officials from among men of low rank. He suffered from epilepsy, and as his health deteriorated, he allegedly tortured, imprisoned, and exiled his real and imagined opponents. Michael Palaiologos was naturally high on the list of suspects. In the summer of 1256, frightened by the emperor's cruel behavior toward his political adversaries,[108] Michael fled to the Turks[109] only to return the following year and be reconciled to Theodore, who sent him to Macedonia to protect the Nicene territories against the despot of Epiros.[110] Still suspicious, Theodore soon had the general brought back to Nicea and imprisoned.[111]

In the first years of her marriage, Theodora obviously did not see much of her husband. She gave birth to their eldest child, Manuel, who died in infancy. Apparently, she also gave birth to a daughter, who was baptized Anna.[112] In August 1258, Michael was released and swore yet another oath of loyalty to the emperor, who died of his epilepsy a few days later and left the crown to his eight-year-old son, John. Marked by the discontent of the nobility, the internal situation of Nicea quickly became untenable. George Mouzalon, the regent appointed by the late emperor, was murdered along with his brother during

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106 *Pachymeres* I, 37 (I,7), see also 39 (I,7).

107 *ODB* III, 2040 f.

108 Pachymeres describes an incident that apparently took place shortly before the emperor's death, involving Michael's sister, Maria-Martha, and her daughter. The emperor married the young woman to one of his favorites, disregarding her previous engagement. Failing to fulfill his duties by his new wife, the young man accused his mother-in-law of witchcraft. Based on his accusation, Martha was stripped naked and put in a sack with wild cats, which were beaten with rods from the outside so that they scratched the poor lady terribly. *Pachymeres* I, 57 (I,12).

109 *Pachymeres* I, 43 f. (I,9), see 42, fn. 1 for further sources.

110 *Pachymeres* I, 45 f. (I,10), see 44, fn. 3 for further sources.

111 *Pachymeres* I, 47–53 (I,11).

112 I suggest that Anna was the eldest of the imperial daughters as she was already engaged to a Serbian prince in 1268/69. As Pachymeres did not object to her age on this occasion (*Pachymeres* II, 453 (V,6)), her birth may be plausibly placed around the year 1256. For sources and literature on Anna, see *PLP*, n. 21350). In 1278, after her engagement had been canceled (apparently not long after it had been concluded), Anna married Demetrios-Michael Koutroules of Epiros.

Theodore's funeral.[113] Soon afterwards, an assembly of the aristocracy, presided over by Patriarch Arsenios Autoreianos, elected Michael regent and protector of the Laskarid prince.[114] Michael's career then took a steep upward turn. In quick succession, he acquired the titles 'grand duke'[115] and 'despot,'[116] and before the end of the year, he had persuaded the patriarch as well as the noblemen that the political situation of Nicea required a mature emperor.[117]

'The most pious empress'

At the beginning of 1259,[118] an imperial coronation took place in Nymphaion.[119] It was preceded by negotiations that granted Michael ceremonial precedence over John IV. On the day of the coronation, Palaiologan partisans pressured the patriarch not to crown John Laskaris until he came of age.[120] Unable to withstand the pressure, the patriarch capitulated. Michael and Theodora received imperial crowns while the legitimate heir wore only a simple band of gold decorated with pearls and precious stones.[121] Though the pro-Laskarid nobility could not have failed to understand this sign, the new emperor gradually secured the support of the aristocracy, the church,[122] and the people with his use of promotions, titles, and generous gifts.

The sources do not indicate how Theodora felt about her husband's behavior towards the orphaned Laskarid prince, who was also her relative. The little we know about the empress's brief rule in Nicea (1259–August 1261) concerns her charity to monastic institutions and her family life. Shortly after 1259, she issued a document to the Monastery of St. John the Theologian, confirming its possession

113 *Pachymeres* I, 79–91 (I,18–20).
114 *Pachymeres* I, 95 f. (I,22), for further sources, see 94, fn. 3.
115 *Pachymeres* I, 97 f. (I, 23).
116 *Pachymeres* I, 105–111 (I,27).
117 *Pachymeres* I, 113 f. (I,29), 129–135 (II,1). On the political ascent of Michael VIII, see Shawcross (2008), see especially 225 ff.
118 Failler claims that the exact date remains uncertain and suggests January 1259 (*Pachymeres* I, 142, fn. 3). Nicol, on the other hand, considers Christmas Day of 1258 a plausible date (Nicol (1972B), 35). According to Papadopoulos, the event took place in either January 1259 or December 1258. (Papadopoulos (1938), 3).
119 *Pachymeres* I, 143–147 (II,8). For further sources, see *ibid.*, 142, fn. 2. Unfortunately, none of these authors mentions Theodora's coronation except for Pachymeres, who speaks about the 'ones carrying the crown' (οἱ τὸ στέφος δεξάμενοι), clearly Michael and Theodora because the young John Laskaris was not crowned. For a precise chronology of the events and a discussion concerning them, see Wirth (1961), 91.
120 *Pachymeres* I, 141 f. (II,7–8).
121 *Pachymeres* I, 147. (II, 8).
122 On the role of the church in legitimizing the position of Michael VIII, see Charanis (1940–1941A), 62.

of the Anabasidion Monastery at Kos with all its property and privileges.[123] Theodora's participation in political life was limited by her maternal duties as she gave birth to two more children during this time: Andronikos, named after his paternal grandfather[124] (1258), and Eirene (1260).

Empress of Byzantium

After his ascent to the throne of Nicea, Michael Palaiologos immediately began to prepare for the reconquest of Constantinople and the restoration of the Byzantine Empire, where he would confirm his status as the emperor whom God had chosen. In a series of military conflicts, culminating in the Battle of Pelagonia (1259), he neutralized his opponents, including Michael II of Epiros, and his allies, Manfred of Sicily and William Villehardouin of Achaia. He also made treaties with his neighbors in a bid to secure his borders and acquire the military support necessary to regain the ancient capital.

The Latin Empire had been in a gradual decline since the late 1250s, and its emperor, Baldwin II,[125] did not possess the resources to reclaim its former glory. Ultimately, Constantinople fell into Byzantine hands thanks to a surprise attack launched by Alexios Strategopoulos while the Latin army and fleet were absent on a raid (July 1261).[126] Preparing to move back to the ancient capital, Michael decided not to share the throne with his young protégé, John Laskaris, who was left imprisoned in Asia Minor.

On the great Feast of the Assumption (August 15, 1261), the imperial court staged a grand return. Despite being in a late phase of pregnancy, Theodora participated in the magnificent procession, which followed the icon of the Theotokos from the Pantokrator Monastery into Constantinople, to the applause of the Greek inhabitants.[127] Michael VIII promptly took charge of rebuilding and reorganizing the city. As the Blacherns Palace was in a state of severe disrepair following the Latin occupation, Theodora's first abode in the ancient capital was the Great Palace, which was also in ruins.[128] It was there that her son Constantine was born in the famous Porphyra chamber, the traditional birthplace of Byzantine imperial children.[129] In accordance with tradition, Constantine's birth was announced by suspending a purple sandal to mark the birth of a male child.[130] Once the Blacherns Palace had been restored, the family moved there. Later, Theodora resided in a

123 *Branouses, Inscriptions*, ns. 31 f. For text, see 265, 272. *MM* VI, 204 f.
124 *Pachymeres* I, 217 (II,31).
125 *ODB* I, 247.
126 For a detailed description, see *Pachymeres* I, 195–203 (II,27).
127 *Gregoras* I, 88 (IV,2).
128 *Pachymeres* I, 219 (II,31). Talbot (1993), 250.
129 See *ODB* III, 1701.
130 *Holobolos*, 91. Macrides (1980), 28.

palace of her own, the Palace of the Despoina, which was apparently situated in the Blacherns imperial palace complex.[131]

At the beginning of autumn 1261, Patriarch Arsenios arrived in Constantinople, and a new imperial coronation took place in Hagia Sophia in September or October of the same year.[132] The sources do not clearly state who was crowned on this occasion. While Manuel Holobolos suggests that the empress was crowned along with her husband,[133] Pachymeres, the principal source on this event, does not confirm this supposition (although he describes her as the crowned empress elsewhere[134]). Therefore, it is not certain whether Theodora also received the crown for the second time or whether she maintained her imperial title based on the Nymphaion coronation and her marriage to the emperor.[135] In light of the advanced stage of her pregnancy as well as the affair concerning Anna-Constance of Hohenstaufen (which will be described presently), the latter option cannot be excluded.

Soon after their move to Constantinople,[136] the imperial couple went through a serious test of their relationship. Pachymeres reports that Michael fell passionately in love (μανικὸς ἔρος) with the young widow of John III Batatzes, Anna-Constance of Hohenstaufen,[137] and made her an offer of marriage. The emperor's motivation was not purely romantic, however, and the proposed union had its political

131 Kidonopoulos (1994), 153 f.

132 *Pachymeres* I, 233 (III,2). See Macrides (1980), 37 f. Failler (1986), 237.

133 *Holobolos*, 77, lines 21 f. In his work on the last centuries of Byzantium, Professor Nicol expressed the opinion that Theodora was crowned along with her husband (Nicol (1972B), 41) as did Geanakoplos (Geanakoplos (1959), 121). As for her son, Failler persuasively argues that Andronikos could only have been proclaimed emperor after the deposition of Patriarch Arsenios in May 1265. For details, see Failler (1986), especially p. 247.

134 *Pachymeres* I, 233 (III,2), 247 (III,7), l. 13: δέσποινα ἐστεμμένη.

135 *Pachymeres* I, 233 (III,2).

136 *Pachymeres* I, 245 ff. (III,7–8). *Gregoras* I, 93 (IV,4). For the dating of these events, see Failler (1980), 77–85. Discussing the facts and views of other scholars, Failler places Michael's plans to divorce Theodora to the fall or end of 1261. He plausibly argues that if the patriarch persuaded Michael to drop his plans to marry Anna-Constance by threatening him with an anathema, their meeting must have taken place before the beginning of 1262 when the patriarch learned about the blinding of John IV Laskaris and had Michael excommunicated. Threatening the emperor with excommunication after he had already been anathematized would have made no sense. See also Geanakoplos (1959), 144 f.

137 On Anna-Constance, see *PLP*, n. 91223. On Michael's designs, see *Pachymeres* I, 245 f. (III,7). Pachymeres is the only author who mentions Michael's plan to marry Anna-Constance. Gregoras merely notes that this empress lived a pious life and that she was exchanged by her half brother Manfred for Alexios Strategopoulos (*Gregoras* I, 91 f. (IV,3)). As Pachymeres mentions a number of details and events connected with the marriage plans, it is improbable that he invented the story. For another account, see also Savvides (1988), 113 ff.

considerations.[138] As the half sister of Manfred of Sicily, Anna would bring her husband a powerful military ally in the West and free Michael's hands for the pending encounter with the Bulgarian tsar, whose wife Eirene, a sister of the dethroned John IV Laskaris, kept prompting her husband to declare war on Byzantium.[139]

Divorcing Theodora did not prove simple. She was, as the chronicler pointed out, a woman of good character and excellent descent, who loved her husband and was well able to reign by his side.[140] On learning of Michael's plans,[141] Theodora, though greatly distressed, decided not to give up her position. She sent a trusted servant to Patriarch Arsenios to apprise him of the emperor's design. Arsenios acted promptly and threatened Michael with anathema if he repudiated his wife.[142] Consequently, Michael VIII relinquished the object of his desire, and Anna-Constance returned to Sicily, exchanged for the captured Byzantine general Alexios Strategopoulos.[143]

In the years that followed, Michael VIII continued his efforts to restore the empire to its former glory. This was a daunting task, considering that the Byzantine provinces were decentralized, the empire required a new infrastructure and a new navy, and the once magnificent city of Constantinople lay in ruins. To finance the reconstruction, the emperor decided to devaluate the coinage and increase taxes, moves which caused a great uprising in Bithynia (1262). The withdrawal of financial resources hurt the peasants in the eastern provinces, facilitating the Turkish invasion. However, even this development had its advantages for Michael as it undermined the position of the pro-Laskarid nobility, who had come to actively oppose the emperor for his treatment of John IV and his sisters.[144]

Though not mentioned by the sources, Theodora must have been preoccupied with matters related to the imperial household and her growing family, which already included Anna,[145] Andronikos, Eirene,[146] and Constantine.[147] After the departure of Anna-Constance, Michael and Theodora apparently overcame their marital crisis, and the empress bore her husband at least two other children, Eudokia[148] and Theodore (born 1263).[149]

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138 Dabrowska (1996), 18.
139 *Pachymeres* I, 247 (III,7).
140 *Pachymeres* I, 245 (III,7).
141 *Pachymeres* I, 247 (III,7).
142 *Pachymeres* I, 247 (III,7).
143 *Pachymeres* I, 249 (III,7). The Nicene general who captured Constantinople in a surprise attack in July 1261. For details on the general, see *PLP*, n. 26894.
144 *Gregoras* I, 92 f. (IV,4). See also Nicol (1972B), 48.
145 *PLP*, n. 21350.
146 *PLP*, n. 21359.
147 *PLP*, n. 21492.
148 *PLP*, n. 12061.
149 On Theodore, see *PLP*, n. 21464. The sources do not mention whether Theodora was in any way involved in the upbringing of her husband's two illegitimate daughters, Maria and Euphrosyne.

The Arsenite controversy[150]

The family conflict of 1261 was immediately followed by another more serious crisis, this time in internal politics. To preclude any possible Laskarid pretensions to the throne, Michael ordered that John IV be blinded. This cruel act was followed by severe persecutions against anyone who dared to criticize him.[151] His behavior enraged those who sympathized with the former dynasty, especially the guardian of the young prince, Patriarch Arsenios, who proceeded to excommunicate the emperor.[152] Although the masses of Constantinople remained loyal to Michael, living in schism with the church proved difficult, and several years later, the emperor sought a more tractable patriarch. He found one in Joseph of Galesion, who lifted the excommunication in 1267.[153]

The deposition of Arsenios mobilized the ex-patriarch's supporters, known as the Arsenites. They were a varied group, consisting of radical Orthodox monks and pro-Laskarid aristocracy from Asia Minor. According to Donald Nicol, they professed "high ideals of the canon law, moral scruple and precedence of church over state, confused with loyalty to the house of Laskaris and antipathy to the policies of Michael VIII."[154] The nuns Eulogia and Martha, sisters of the emperor, were also involved in this movement despite their having once had a close relationship with their brother. Martha had raised Michael in her own household after their parents' untimely death,[155] but it was Eulogia who was the emperor's favorite sister. She had cuddled him as a baby, and (years later) she hurried to the imperial palace at sunrise to give her brother the news that Constantinople was once more in Byzantine hands. Theodora's opinion regarding the deposition of the patriarch remains unknown. On one hand, she was indebted to Arsenios for saving her from a humiliating divorce; on the other hand, she must have wished for Michael to be reconciled to the Orthodox Church and for her son Andronikos to succeed his father on the throne.

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150 For a detailed account of the events of the Arsenite schism, see *Pachymeres* II, 437 ff. (V,2) (on the growth of the Arsenite movement in Asia Minor), 383 f. (IV,19) (on the forming of the Arsenite party in Constantinople), 407 ff. (IV,28) (on the division of the church due to the Arsenite schism). Nicol (1972B), 48–50. Hussey (1986), 221 f., 244. Laurent (1960), 45–54. Salaville (1947), 116–136. Sykoutres (1929–1930). Tinnefeld (2012). Shawcross (2008).

151 *Pachymeres* I, 255 f. (III,10–11). Laiou (1973), 136.

152 *Pachymeres* I, 267 f. (III,14). *Gregoras* I, 93 (IV,4).

153 *Pachymeres* II, 333 f. (IV,2). *Gregoras* I, 107 f. (IV,8).

154 Nicol (1972B), 50.

155 *Pachymeres* I, 179 (II,23).

Theodora and her daughters' weddings

In the 1260s, the external situation of the empire was far from peaceful. Hoping to placate his enemies and gain new allies, Michael began to offer his daughters in marriage. Anna was given to the son of the despot of Epiros (1278); Eirene became the wife of the Bulgarian tsar (1278); and Eudokia married the emperor of Trebizond (1282).[156] Nor were the Mongol rulers ignored as Michael gave one of his illegitimate daughters, Maria, to Khan Abaqa (1265)[157] and the other, Euphrosyne,[158] to Nogay (around 1270). In search of still more support in the West, Michael betrothed his eldest son, Andronikos, to the daughter of the Hungarian king (1272).[159]

Occasionally, Theodora exercised a certain influence over the arrangement of these marriages. When her daughter Anna was offered to the younger son of the Serbian tsar in 1269, the empress prepared a magnificent dowry and sent Anna off in the company of the patriarch. Nevertheless, she asked *chartophylax* John Bekkos (who would later become patriarch) to assess the situation in Serbia – the local way of life and the organization of the government – before delivering the princess.[160] Acting on Theodora's instructions, Bekkos left Anna in Ochrid, and the legates journeyed on to meet with the Serbian king. Pachymeres describes in darkest colors the arrival of the Byzantine embassy at the Serbian court. When told that a group of Byzantine servants and eunuchs were to wait on the princess, the tsar allegedly pointed to a half-naked woman who was sewing in a corner of the room, indicating the position of women in his realm. This and other incidents led to the speedy departure of the *chartophylax* and his company. After collecting Anna at Ochrid, they took her back to Constantinople.[161]

Failler, who situated these events in 1269, offers a credible explanation for the curious behavior of the Serbian tsar: Stephan I Uroš, who had fallen under strong Hungarian influence, needed to reverse his agreement with the Byzantine emperor and upset the wedding plans intentionally (no doubt to Anna's liking).[162] Michael apparently respected his wife's right to help decide the fates of their children, for he requested Theodora's opinion regarding the marriage of their daughter Eirene

156 *Pachymeres* II, 653–659 (VI,34). *Gregoras* I, 148 f. (V,7). The wedding apparently took place shortly before the death of Michael VIII. For details, see *Lampsides, Panaretos*, 62. *Alp-Talwar, Panaretos*, 189.

157 *PLP*, n. 21395. *Pachymeres* I, 235 (III,3). *Pachymeres* II, 443 (V,3), 515 (V,24).

158 *PLP*, Add. 1–8, n. 91916. *Pachymeres* I, 243 (III,5). Papadopoulos (1938), 33, n. 53. Failler (1981B), 210–211.

159 Zástěrová *et al.* (1996), 299.

160 *Pachymeres* II, 453 ff. (V,6).

161 *Pachymeres* II, 453 ff. (V,6). Failler (1981).

162 Anna later married the son of the Epirote despot, Demetrios-Michael Koutroules, in 1278. See *Pachymeres* II, 559 f. (VI,6).

to John III Mytzes Asen of Bulgaria.[163] In the spring of 1281, Theodora and Michael married their youngest daughter, Eudokia, to John II Komnenos of Trebizond, who officially submitted to his future father-in-law prior to his marriage. After the wedding, which took place in Constantinople, the newlyweds departed for Trebizond.[164]

Theodora's charity to monastic houses in Asia Minor

As Alice-Mary Talbot noted, "in the Byzantine world view there could be no better use of one's wealth than for the construction of churches for the glory of God and the establishment of monasteries to house monks and nuns who would pray for the soul of the founder of their religious house."[165] Even after her return to Constantinople, the empress did not cease to support monastic institutions in Asia Minor. The documents that have been preserved indicate that she took a long-term interest in several private institutions: St. John the Theologian Monastery on Patmos (described as τὸ ἰδιόκτητον μοναστήριον)[166]; Theotokos Lembiotissa Monastery near Smyrna, which she acquired through inheritance (γονικόθεν); and other, smaller monasteries in her private domain of Kos (Anabasidion, Christ Savior, and a monastery known as ton Spondon). For these houses alone, Theodora published at least nine documents in the period from 1259 to 1285.[167]

As some of her documents have been lost,[168] the regional, material, and chronological aspects of the empress's charity cannot be properly analyzed.[169] The available texts mostly concern property matters. In 1262, she validated the privileges of the Lembiotissa Monastery near Smyrna.[170] Sometime before May 1263, the abbot of the monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos applied to the empress to reconfirm the privilege from 1259 (mentioned above). Theodora granted his request

163 *Pachymeres* II, 557 (VI,5).

164 *Gregoras* I, 148 (V,7).

165 Talbot (2001A), 332.

166 Theodora was not the first empress to support this monastery. The sources reveal that the community enjoyed the munificence of Empress Eirene, the wife of John III Batatzes, who guaranteed the monks immunity from taxes on two boats. For details, see Barišić (1971), 145, 195.

167 Barišić (1971), 146–158.

168 All three *metochia* (subordinated monastic houses) appear in the report of Leon Eskammatismenos, who was entrusted with overseeing the properties of St. John the Theologos on Patmos from 1263. The donation document for the Spondon Monastery is missing. *MM* VI, 217 ff.

169 For an edition that also contains a detailed analysis of these texts, see *Branouses, Inscriptions* I, ns. 31, 32, 34, 36. Compare with the dating and analysis of Barišić (1971), 157, the study by Talbot (1992), 296–297, and the article by Dölger (1928), see 352 f. See also *Dölger, Regesten*, ns. 1872, 1963.

170 *MM* IV, 260 f.

and confirmed St. John to be in possession of the Anabasidion Monastery on Kos along with its possessions and privileges.[171] In her third preserved *horismos* (order), published in August 1268, the empress confirmed the properties and privileges of the Spondon Monastery on Kos and forbade anyone to interfere with it.[172] Finally, in July 1269, she corroborated one of her husband's documents, exempting St. John on Patmos from paying taxes on four ships.[173] In 1270 or 1285, she also confirmed a donation made by one of her court officials, a John Komes, who gave the Lembiotissa Monastery a piece of land known as the 'Hagia.'[174]

These documents may represent only a fraction of Theodora's orders, for some monasteries were later destroyed along with their archives. The preserved texts nevertheless indicate that the empress closely cooperated with the emperor, the patriarch, and local officials,[175] who issued and confirmed privileges for her monastic houses. The available evidence shows that Theodora used a seal bearing the inscription "Θεοδώρα εὐσεβεστάτη αὐγοῦστα Δούκαινα ἡ Παλαιολογῖνα" (see Ill. 1 a-b).[176] When exactly she began using it remains uncertain; however, a lead seal with this inscription was attached to the *horismos* of 1268.[177] The earliest possible dating would naturally be after her coronation in Nymphaion at the beginning of 1259.

Theodora in imperial images

In the course of his reign, Michael rebuilt St. Demetrios in Constantinople and St. Michael the Archangel on Mount Auxentios, monasteries that had previously been patronized by his ancestors. Besides these two monastic houses (strategically dedicated to military saints), he may have sponsored foundations or images of the imperial couple and their eldest son. According to Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo, an early fifteenth-century ambassador of Henry III of Castile to Tamerlane, Theodora was included in the damaged portrait flanking the Theotokos at the church entrance of Maria Peribleptos.[178] A similar image, depicting Michael, Theodora, and Andronikos wearing halos and the Theotokos holding a model of the church, was found in St. Mary in Apollonia (Albania).[179] According to Cecily Hilsdale, the intent

171 *Branouses, Inscriptions*, ns. 31, 32, for text, see 265, 272. *MM* VI, 204 f.
172 *Branouses, Inscriptions*, n. 34, for text, see 278 f.
173 *Branouses, Inscriptions*, n. 36, for text, see 286 f.
174 *MM* IV, 175 ff.
175 See, for example, *MM* VI, 205 f.
176 Campagnolo-Pothitou–Cheynet (2016), 36, for a photograph, see p. 37. Laurent (1962), 10–12, ns. 15–16. Szemioth–Wasilewski (1966), 9.
177 For details on the lead seal, see Zacos–Veglery (1972), I, 122. Kaygusuz (1983), 62.
178 Vin (1980), 263. Talbot (1993), 254.
179 For a recent interpretation and illustrations, see Fingarova (2011–2012), esp. 287 f. See also Buschhausen–Buschhausen (1976), 154, 174, 176, fig. 104. Hilsdale (2014),



Ill. 1a: *The lead seal (obverse) of Theodora Palaiologina. © Musées d'art et d'histoire, Ville de Genève, n° inv. CdN 2004-0585 (Photo: Flora Bevilacqu)*

of the fresco is to emphasize imperial power through patronage and underscore the legitimacy of the Palaiologan dynasty.[180] The fact that none of the couple's other children are included in either of the images suggests that the artist's object was an image of the emperors rather than a donor portrait of the Palaiologan family.

The controversy surrounding the Union of Lyons (1274)[181]

Having been damaged by the scandal following the blinding of John IV Laskaris, the deposition of Arsenios, and especially by efforts to effect a union with the

103–106, figs. 2.4a and 2.4b. Johannes Koder and Erich Trapp considered Theodora the founder of the church. For details, see Koder–Trapp (1966), 391.

180 Hilsdale (2014), 106.

181 For further details and literature, see Geanakoplos (1959), ch. 11 and 12. Riebe (2005). Nicol (1972B), 58–61. Blanchet (2003). Hussey (1986) 225–235. Nicol (1961). Nicol (1971). Nicol (1962). Nicol (1972B), 67–70, 84–86. Salaville (1947). Roberg (1964). Wolter–Holstein (1966). Meyendorff (1971), 58–61. For an introduction to the origin and development of the conflict between East and West, see Runciman (1953). Nikolaou (2004). Gill (1947). Magoulias (1982). Laurent (1927). Kolbaba (2000). For a connection with art, see Cormack (2006), see especially 116. For the negotiations in Lyons, see Geanakoplos (1989), 195–223, (ch. 10). Nicol (1961).



Ill. 1b: *The lead seal (reverse) of Theodora Palaiologina. © Musées d'art et d'histoire, Ville de Genève, n° inv. CdN 2004-0585 (Photo: Flora Bevilacqu)*

Catholic Church, Michael's popularity began to wane. Negotiations with the pope, which had been initiated in order to prevent another crusade and secure time to stabilize the empire,[182] had incensed Byzantine clerical and monastic circles as well as part of the lay population. Yet pressure from the West was quickly mounting. Charles I of Anjou, Baldwin II of Constantinople, and William of Achaia signed an anti-Byzantine treaty in Viterbo (1267), which transferred most of Baldwin's claims to Charles.[183] At the same time, Pope Clement IV was eager to bring the Byzantines into the Catholic fold, being in the happy position of demanding surrender in return for preventing the pending crusade. In September 1271, a new pope, Gregory X, acceded to the Holy See, and a year later he announced an ecumenical council to be held in Lyons in the spring of 1274. Gregory dissuaded Charles of Anjou, the leader of the anti-Byzantine coalition, from invading Byzantium but did not mitigate the requirements set for the union of the two churches.[184] In order to avert the crusade, Michael VIII tried to persuade his clergy to assent to the pope's conditions. Unfortunately, the exigency of the situation

182 *Guiraud, Registres*, 135, n. 295.
183 *Gregoras* I, 123 (V,1).
184 *Gregoras* I, 125 (V,1).

failed to impress the representatives of the Orthodox Church.[185] As the date of the council approached, the emperor took desperate measures to gain control of the political scene, imprisoning and silencing his opponents. The Metropolitan of Nicea, Theophanes, and the *grand logothete,* George Akropolites, formulated the text of the Union, which acknowledged the sovereignty of the pope, his right of jurisdiction in canonical matters, and the inclusion of his name in the liturgy.[186] With these documents, the Byzantine delegation sailed west to attend the Second Council of Lyons.

After several months, the parties reached an agreement. The Union of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches was celebrated in Lyons on July 6, 1274,[187] and proclaimed in Constantinople on January 16, 1275. Its results, however, were double-edged. It did prevent the pope from approving a crusade against the empire but at the same time it significantly increased the division of Byzantine society.[188] Patriarch Joseph abdicated and was replaced by a recent convert to the Unionist cause, the scholar and theologian John Bekkos. A new wave of opposition formed, including the Arsenites, the Josephites (partisans of the ex-patriarch), and several important members of the imperial family. The new pope, Nicholas III, refused to allow a crusade against the Byzantine Empire; however, in November 1277, he requested confirmation of the Byzantine commitment to the Lyons agreement. In August 1279, the emperor once again pleaded for the cooperation of the Orthodox clergy, but as persuasion proved useless in garnering their acceptance of the Unionist ritual, he again resorted to persecution.[189]

Between 1265 and 1282, the sources rarely mention Theodora's involvement in public affairs. In the *Confession of Faith*, published after the Union was cancelled, the empress acknowledged her hesitation to embrace this 'new invention.'[190] The fact that Theodora's mother became involved in the controversy (and allegedly lost her property due to her opposition to the Union)[191] as well as the fact that the empress had an anti-Unionist confessor who was later exiled[192] suggest that her

185 The patriarch rejected the concessions to the pope suggested by the emperor. For details, see *Laurent, Dossier*, 135.

186 Zástěrová *et al.* (1996), 301.

187 *Gregoras* I, 125 (V,2). For details on the preparations for the council, see Nicol (1962).

188 *Gregoras* I, 125 ff. (V,2).

189 See, for example, *Gregoras* I, 127 (V,2). For the Byzantine reaction to the Union, see Nicol (1971).

190 Mitsiou (2016), 92. *Petrides, Chrysobulle*, 26.

191 Loenertz (1965), 392. This document mentions the names of the emperor's relatives and subjects who were imprisoned and/or dispossessed for their opposition to the Union. The document calls Eudokia "his [Emperor Michael VIII's] mother, the wife of the *sebastokrator.*" It is nevertheless clear that the author meant Michael's mother-in-law Eudokia, wife of the *sebastokrator* John Doukas Batatzes because Michael's father had held the title *megas domestikos.*

192 *Laurent, John of Heracleia*, 41, 45 f.

sympathies lay with the persecuted parties. She must have watched the clashes between the Palaiologan siblings when Michael's sisters, the nuns Martha[193] and Eulogia,[194] became deeply involved in the Arsenite and anti-Unionist movements. Eventually, she saw both of them dispossessed and Eulogia and her daughter Theodora dispatched to prison in Nicea. Possibly fearing that Michael would repudiate her, the empress did not outwardly oppose the Union. On the other hand, she must have been aware of the atmosphere within the city, and she undoubtedly realized that Michael's policies could seriously destabilize the position of the young dynasty. Considering the later anti-Unionism of Andronikos II and his willingness to reverse the pro-Latin policy in respect to church issues, the question may be posed whether Theodora, supported by her mother, did not follow the path of her saintly namesake, the spouse of Theophilos, who instructed her children to hold religious views opposing those of their father.

Though not openly involved, Theodora did occasionally intervene to aid the persecuted anti-Unionists. She appealed to her husband on behalf of Michael Strategopoulos, her cousin, who incurred imperial disfavor by secretly meeting with a man named George, an opponent of imperial ecclesiastical policy. Thanks to Theodora's support, her cousin did not lose his sight.[195] In 1280, the empress also showed mercy to her treasurer, Kaloeidas. A pamphlet slandering the emperor was found in his possession, and Michael ordered the blinding of the wretched man. After repeated pleas on the part of the empress, the emperor changed his verdict and ordered sheets of parchment (perhaps the pamphlet) to be burned on the head of the unfortunate treasurer, whose nose was then slit in front of the gathered clergy.[196] The despot of Epiros likewise enlisted the empress's assistance on behalf of his brother John, who had been imprisoned for meeting with an anti-Unionist monk.[197] The extent of Theodora's involvement in this case remains uncertain.

Despite Theodora's pleas to the contrary,[198] Michael and his eldest son, Andronikos, set out on a campaign against disobedient vassals at the end of 1282. The emperor's health quickly deteriorated, and he died in a small village close to Rhadeistos in Thrace on December 11.[199] Although his political successes were many, his treatment of the remaining members of the Laskarid dynasty and his support of the Union of Lyons had estranged Michael from many of his subjects as well as from the Orthodox Church, which posthumously condemned his memory.

193 *PLP*, n. 21389.
194 *PLP*, n. 21360.
195 *Pachymeres* II, 615 f. (VI,24).
196 *Pachymeres* II, 621 (VI,25).
197 *Pachymeres* II, 615 (VI,24).
198 *Pachymeres* II, 659–661 (VI,35).
199 *Gregoras* I, 152 f. (V,7).

The imperial widow and her *Confession of Faith*

After seeing to the hasty burial of his father, Andronikos II returned to Constantinople to take charge of the empire. He apprised Theodora of Michael's death[200] and may have discussed the political situation and his ensuing moves with her. In the days that followed, he cancelled the Union of Lyons, released political prisoners, and recalled the anti-Unionist exiles.[201] Among those who returned to Constantinople was Theodora's sister-in-law, the nun Eulogia. The years of exile and imprisonment clearly had not dampened her spirit, and she promptly advised the widowed empress to give up all hope for Michael's salvation. Undeterred, Theodora sought the council of the patriarch to see how she could aid her husband, and she even mentioned Michael's secret plan, made towards the end of his life, to return the former patriarch Joseph to his position. It was all to no avail.[202]

In the second half of April 1283, a synod of anti-Unionists assembled for the second time in the Blacherns Palace to judge the Unionist clergy.[203] Empress Theodora was called on to appear before the gathered representatives of the church and publicly separate herself from the Union in order to avoid excommunication.[204] She complied and placed a cross[205] on an official *Confession of Faith*, which was probably read aloud.[206] In return for her public penance, she was released from the condemnation proclaimed over the Unionists and maintained her status as an Orthodox empress.

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200 *Gregoras* I, 159 (VI,1).

201 Nicol (1972B), 100 ff.

202 *Pachymeres* III, 25 (VII, 3).

203 For details on this event, see the recent study of Ekaterini Mitsiou (Mitsiou (2016), 81 f.).

204 *Pachymeres* III, 67 (VII,19), IV, 513 f. (XII,2). Pachymeres claims that if Theodora had not complied with this requirement, the patriarch would have refused her communion. *Pachymeres* III, 139 (VIII, 5). Nicol (1972B), 103.

205 *Moschonas, Katalogoi*, 184. The incipit of the chrysobull in *Cod. Par. gr.* 2075, fol. 244 informs us that Theodora added a cross to the document in order to confirm her view on ecclesiastical matters: "τὸ ἴσον τῆς ὁμολογίας τῆς κραταιᾶς καὶ ἁγίας ἡμῶν κυρίας καὶ δεσποίνης ἐπὶ τοῖς ἐκκλησιαστικοῖς πράγμασιν, ὅπερ διὰ οἰκειοχείρου στ(αυ)ροῦ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἐπιστῶσατο καὶ κάτω διὰ τῆς οἰκείας στήλης ἐν χρυσίνῃ βούλλῃ φερομένης καὶ ἀπηωρημένης δι' ὀξείας μετάξης." Her signature beneath runs: "Θεοδώρα ἐν χ(ριστ)ῷ τῷ θ(ε)ῷ πιστὴ αὐγοῦστα καὶ αὐτοκρατόρισσα Ῥωμαίων Δούκαινα Κομνηνή ἡ Παλαιολογίνα." Mitsiou (2016), 92. See also *Petrides*, 26. On signs used as signatures in Byzantium, see Mitsiou–Preiser-Kapeller (2010), 240.

206 *Pachymeres* III, 67 f. (VII,19). For the text, see Mitsiou (2016), 92, 94, for an introduction, manuscripts, paleographical notes, and historical circumstances, see *ibid.*, 77–91. See also *Petrides, Chrysobulle*, 25–28. For a review of Petrides's study, see Petit (1916–1919), 286–287.

The *Confession of Faith* is the only document of its kind ever published and authenticated by a Byzantine empress.[207] The introductory passage states that Theodora signed it with a cross and attached to it a golden bull bearing her image and suspended on a cord of purple silk. The text, probably formulated by a ghost-writer, may be roughly divided into three parts. In the opening passage, Theodora rejected the Union (described as the "disastrous affair which wickedly occurred in the Church and brought her to total confusion"[208]). She also admitted that she had been connected with it and was even aware of its atrocity as its novelty awoke her suspicion. In the second part, she condemned the partisans of the Union, summarily called the "enemies of the Church of God and traitors of their own salvation."[209] This included her husband, of course, even though he was not explicitly named. Furthermore, the empress separated herself specifically from the chief theological representatives of the Union, Patriarch John Bekkos, Constantine Meliteniotes, and George Metochites, who became the scapegoats of the ecclesiastical purge. This passage may have been included because Theodora, as the wife of Michael VIII, was necessarily publicly (and perhaps even privately) connected with the former patriarch and his co-workers, who would have attended celebrations at the palace and dined in the imperial family circle. Such associations had to be properly renounced. The final passage contains Theodora's promise never to request an ecclesiastical burial for her husband and to care only for her own salvation.

According to recent research, Theodora was singled out as the wife of the condemned emperor and an important representative of the ruling dynasty. No specific accusations were raised against her as she did not sign correspondence with Rome, had an anti-Unionist spiritual father, and had intervened on behalf of several anti-Unionists.[210] The tone of the confession as well as the chronicle of Pachymeres confirm that, despite these facts, Theodora entered the Council of Blacherns as a penitent and not as a protector of the true faith. Her situation recalls her namesake, the wife of the iconoclast emperor Theophilos, who acquired a halo for herself and secured an ecclesiastical pardon for her husband under similar circumstances. Theodora Palaiologina was apparently at a disadvantage in that her son was an adult and it was his aunt, Eulogia, who was given credit for having influenced his actions in regard to the cancellation of the Union. Consequently, the

207 Mitsiou (2016), 92. *Petrides, Chrysobulle*, 26. It is not certain whether Theodora read the text aloud or a cleric read it for her. As the empress most probably could read, she may have pronounced the text in front of the assembled synod. While Theodora was the only empress known to have publicly rejected the Union and signed a confession of faith, she was not the only empress to stand in front of a synod. In the middle of the eleventh century, Empress Eudokia, the wife of Constantine X Doukas, vowed never to remarry in front of the patriarch and the gathered clergy. For the details and circumstances surrounding this event, see Oikonomides (1975).

208 Mitsiou (2016), 92, (trans.) 93.

209 *Ibid.*

210 Mitsiou (2016), 82.

empress could claim only a minor share in the renewal of Orthodoxy. It took more than a century for her to become associated with the events of 1283, when John Eugenikos, an anti-Unionist scholar and prolific writer, called her 'saint Theodora' and placed her at Andronikos's side when describing the holy emperors who together 'rid the church of the bitter and weed-like root of Latinism.'[211]

While a wife was normally expected to care for the memory of her husband, Theodora vowed not to follow this custom. Was it merely a political decision? The relationship of Theodora and Michael seems to have been of a peculiar nature. The documents published by Theodora in her widowhood, as Alice-Mary Talbot noted,[212] radically condemn Michael and his work. In her *Confession of Faith*, the empress all but explicitly pronounced her husband a heretic. In the rule for the Convent of Lips, she never mentioned him by name and even stated that in the course of their joint rule, she had longed for her son to replace his father.[213] It is difficult to judge to what extent Theodora's desire to reconcile with the Orthodox Church, mitigate the anti-Unionist hysteria, and strengthen the position of her son and the Palaiologan dynasty impacted the wording of these texts. Clearly, the sources do not reveal any signs of Michael's having displayed tenderness toward his wife,[214] and Theodora did have several reasons to be angry with him, not least of which were the dispossession of her mother and the affair with Anna-Constance of Hohenstaufen. On the other hand, the couple had seven children and had overcome a serious marital crisis. More importantly, when Michael was leaving for Thrace in the winter of 1282, Theodora publicly reproached him for not taking care of his body and his life.[215] Despite their differences, Theodora apparently valued Michael's ability to protect and promote the family as well as his political acumen. In light of these facts, it would seem that her actions and messages following his death must have been motivated primarily by her fears for the future of the dynasty and her own salvation.

The widowed mother

Though a detailed inquiry into the lives of individual members of the imperial family goes beyond the framework of this study, it is necessary to mention some of the most important biographical facts in order to gain insight into Theodora's family life. Although she remained in the background, she was active in supporting the reign of her eldest son[216] and was very involved in family matters as well. The

211 *Eugenikos*, 130.
212 Talbot (1992), 303.
213 *Delehaye, Typika*, 108.
214 *Michael Palaiologos*, 451.
215 *Pachymeres* II, 659 f. (VI,6).
216 Pachymeres mentions her presence as her son was making important decisions related to state affairs. Additionally, some important meetings apparently took place in her quarters. *Pachymeres* III, 261 f. (IX,16–17).

empress participated in a variety of festive occasions, including the marriages and baptisms of her children and grandchildren. She became the wedding sponsor at the marriage of her eldest son, Andronikos, and Eirene (Yolanda of Montferrat)[217] and suggested that her granddaughter by Princess Anna should marry Alexios Rhaoul.[218] In 1295–6, she became the godmother of the Armenian Princess Theophano, who took the name Theodora on her conversion to Orthodoxy.[219]

Eventually, however, family became a source of concern for the widowed and aging empress. While she never wavered in her support for Andronikos, Theodora had reason to be concerned for her younger children since the emperor did not hesitate to use his siblings to attain his political goals nor was he afraid to neutralize anyone he perceived as a threat to his reign or offspring. Andronikos feared the political influence of his younger brother Constantine in particular. Also known as Constantine the Porphyrogennetos,[220] the young man was popular and handsome and was allegedly a good soldier and strategist. According to Pachymeres, he was Michael VIII's favorite son, and the emperor had even allowed him to wear the imperial purple for a time. Michael had also planned to marry Constantine to a Latin lady and establish him as the ruler of an independent principality.[221] Perhaps due to his preoccupation with politics, Michael had been slow to bestow the title of *despot* on his younger sons. (Constantine was twenty-one and Theodore nineteen when their father died.) Still, Constantine appeared to be well situated even after his father's death. He had received a vast, private fortune from Michael[222] and had married the 'most beautiful daughter of Raoul.' They lived in Nymphaion in Lydia where Constantine had refounded the Stoudiou Monastery. As time passed, however, it seems that Constantine became involved in intrigue. In March 1293, a rumor that he had bribed the generals and prepared a *coup d'état* reached Andronikos, who was already jealous and suspicious of his brother. He ordered Constantine to present himself at the palace in front of the gathered family, clergy, and senate. Following the testimonies of Constantine's detractors, Andronikos had him imprisoned in the palace and confiscated his property.[223] This distressed Theodora, who repeatedly petitioned the emperor on his brother's behalf, but Andronikos vowed he would never pardon Constantine. Fearing that Theodora might free the prisoner in his absence, Andronikos even took his brother (in chains) to the wedding of his daughter Simonis in Thessalonike (1299).[224]

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217 *Pachymeres* III, 101 (VII,33).
218 *Pachymeres* IV, 351 (X,22), see also 250, fn. 21.
219 *Pachymeres* III, 233 (IX,6). Theophano was the sister of Empress Maria-Rita, the wife of Emperor Michael IX.
220 *PLP*, n. 21492. For details on Constantine the Porphyrogennetos, see Barišić (1983).
221 *Gregoras* I, 187 ff. (VI,6). *Pachymeres* II, 631 f. (VI,28).
222 *Pachymeres* III, 175 (VIII,19).
223 *Pachymeres* III, 177 f. (VIII,19), 209 f. (VIII,29). Gregoras insists on Constantine's innocence. *Gregoras* I, 186–190 (VI,6).
224 *Gregoras* I, 203 (VI,9). Constantine remained in prison until his death in May 1306.

The empress also asked her eldest son to bestow the title of despot on his youngest brother, Theodore.[225] Once again, Andronikos declined his mother's request.[226] Pachymeres describes how the emperor wished to marry his brother to a daughter of the *protovestiarios* Mouzalon. When the girl was found guilty of adultery, Theodore apparently declined the marriage, and Andronikos, who had wished to express thanks to the girl's father for his many years of loyal service, married her to his second son, Constantine, instead. Soon afterwards, this Constantine[227] received the title of despot while Theodore "was judged unworthy" of it. The emperor then conveniently swore never to make Theodore a despot and offered him the title *sebastokrator*, which the latter declined. While Theodora was always there to assist Andronikos in whatever way he needed, the manner in which he treated his siblings, especially his brothers, must have put a strain on their relationship.

The empress must have been often concerned also for her daughters. The eldest, Princess Anna,[228] who so narrowly escaped being wed to the Serbian prince, later married the son of Michael II of Epiros (1278), Demetrios-Michael Koutroules, who lived as a kind of hostage at the Byzantine court.[229] Princess Anna died before 1301, and Theodora buried her, the first member of the Palaiologan imperial family to be laid to rest in the newly restored mausoleum in the Convent of Lips. Theodora's second daughter, Eirene, married the Bulgarian tsar, John III Mytzes Asen, in 1278. However, one year later, a peasant revolt shook Bulgaria, and the couple fled to Byzantium.[230] Together they reared ten children, one of whom later married the captain of the Catalan Company, Roger de Flor.[231] Theodora's youngest daughter, Eudokia, evidently named after her maternal grandmother, became the wife of John II of Trebizond. After the death of her husband, she returned to Constantinople. When Andronikos tried to persuade her to marry Stephan Uroš II Milutin of Serbia (1298), she firmly declined. To avoid further marriage proposals, Eudokia returned to Trebizond where she predeceased her mother on December 13, 1301.[232] In 1282, Theodora's widowed stepdaughter, Maria, returned to Constantinople with her daughter, Theodora Arachantloun. She rebuilt a Constantinopolitan monastery known as *ton Mougoulion* (of the Mongols), where she may have taken her vows and lived as the nun Melane. Like her stepbrothers and stepsisters, she did not escape the political schemes of the young emperor, who persuaded her to leave the convent and then sent her to Nicea to negotiate with (or to marry) another Mongol ruler, Kharmbandas (1307).[233]

225 *PLP*, n. 21464.
226 *Pachymeres* III, 201 f. (VIII,26). *Pachymeres* IV, 467 (XI,22).
227 The son of Andronikos II (not his uncle Constantine, the son of Michael VIII).
228 *PLP*, n. 21350.
229 *Gregoras* I, 204 (VI,9).
230 *Gregoras* I, 133 (V,3).
231 After Theodora's death, Andronikos, fearing a *coup d'état*, imprisoned his sister in Constantinople.
232 *Lampsides, Panaretos*, 63.
233 For further details on Maria's role as a negotiator, see Melichar (2017), 111 f.

The patroness

Though the sources do not provide information about Theodora's formal education,[234] she appears to have been a highly cultured lady, who was involved in both literary and artistic patronage. In his monody on the empress, Theodore Metochites noted that she financed the decoration (and possibly also the writing) of religious books and holy images.[235] The monody speaks about both books and images in the plural, suggesting that the empress's patronage was not a marginal affair. One of these 'images' was probably the icon of the Theotokos, covered with gilded silver and donated to the Lavra Monastery on Athos. On its right side, it bears the name of Andronikos and on the left, that of Theodora, which reads 'Θεοδώρα ἐυσεβεστάτη ἀυγούστη δούκενα ἡ Παλαιολόγος.'[236] The inscription, surprisingly, does not contain Theodora's monastic name 'Eugenia.' Considering that the recipient of the gift was a monastic community, the use of the empress's monastic name would have stressed the spiritual kinship between the donor and the recipients. Its absence suggests that the empress had not yet taken her vows when the icon was donated. While joint donations by Theodora and Andronikos could have been made on various occasions, such a gift would have fitted the circumstances of the period just after the Second Council of Blacherns and the abolition of the Union and before Andronikos's marriage (1284) to his second wife, Eirene-Yolanda of Montferrat, who would probably have been mentioned along with her husband. Within that timeframe, Andronikos was a widower and Theodora was the sole empress at the court, which would explain the joint donation. A pious act of patronage at exactly this time would have been appropriate for rulers who wished to show their dedication to Orthodox doctrine and shun any connection with the Union.

As for the books mentioned by Theodore Metochites, Theodora was also involved in manuscript patronage though only a few works can be positively linked with her name. The most famous are the two *typika,* or monastic rules, composed for the foundations of Lips and Anargyroi, which shall be examined in

234 Theodora's interest in manuscripts, their decoration and translation necessarily speaks in favor of her literacy. The main argument against it is the fact that she signed her *Confession of Faith* of 1283 with a simple cross. On the other hand, the synod may have wished to spare the empress the excessive embarrassment of requesting her full signature. Also, while evidence of female literacy is rare, it does exist. There is Theodora Raoulaina (*PLP*, n. 10943), who composed the lives of two iconoclast saints and copied a (preserved) manuscript of Aristeides. Though she was certainly an exceptional scholar, the *PLP* also mentions five female scribes, who apparently earned their living by copying manuscripts. There is also Eirene Palaiologina Choumnaina, who corresponded with her spiritual guide (for details see PLP, n. 30936), and Empress Helene Palaiologina, who wrote a eulogy on her father.

235 Sideras (1982), 260.

236 *Millet, Inscriptions*, 118 f., n. 359 (accents as they appear in the source).

detail later. One manuscript inscription also indicates that in 1265–6 the empress hired a certain monk named Arsenios to translate into Greek the highly influential work known as the *Treatise on the Principles of Sand Science* by the Persian philosopher Muhammad al-Zanati,[237] which presents a system of earth divination with astrological attributes. Theodora's reasons for having the work copied are unknown. Did she wish to divine the future or did she intend it, for example, as a diplomatic gift?

In their studies, Alice-Mary Talbot,[238] Robert Nelson, and John Lowden[239] also argued for Theodora's patronage of at least part of a group of *de luxe* manuscripts known as 'the Palaiologina[240] Group.'[241] Produced in Constantinople in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries,[242] these manuscripts include Gospels, a New Testament, lectionaries, Psalters, a Praxapostolos, and the *Homilies of St. Basil*,[243] which have similar illuminations, ornaments, and shape of script.[244] If the assumptions of the above scholars are correct, Theodora collaborated with a group of scribes and illuminators to produce a number of manuscripts of theological works. The dating of these codices to around the year 1300 coincides with the empress's patronage of the above nunneries, whose *typika* indicate that both houses had lost their possessions before she decided to become their patron. In order to revive the spiritual life of these houses, the empress would have needed basic theological works precisely at this time, which would further support the theory of Nelson, Lowden, and Talbot regarding the identity of the mysterious Palaiologina.[245]

Collector of sacred relics

According to an episode recorded in the vita of an obscure iconophile saint, Michael of Chalcedon, Theodora allegedly entrusted a servant with a small fortune and sent him to acquire for her a relic of the saint. When the servant arrived in Chalcedon (possibly after the monastery had refused to sell him the relic), he enlisted the aid of a cleric and together they bribed the gatekeeper and entered the sanctuary[246] by

237 *Pierleoni, Catalogus*, 284. Kunitsch (1967), 309–317. For further details, see Tyson (2009), 59.

238 Talbot (1992), 302.

239 Nelson–Lowden (1991), 66 f.

240 The name is based on an initial of a female member of the imperial family inscribed in one of the manuscripts, *Vaticanus gr.* 1158.

241 For detailed information, see Buchthal–Belting (1978) and Nelson–Lowden (1991).

242 Nelson–Lowden (1991), 66.

243 For a list of these texts, see Buchthal–Belting (1978), 4 f. Nelson–Lowden (1991), 59 f.

244 For a description of elements in the *Typikon of Lips*, see Talbot (1992), 301 f. Nelson–Lowden (1991), 65 f.

245 See also Talbot (1992), 301. Talbot (2011–2012), 260, 269 f.

246 Janin (1975), 60.

night, hoping to cut off the saint's hand. Their plan was unexpectedly frustrated by the saint himself, who clutched his hand as the two men prepared to cut it off. Punishment followed swiftly: the perpetrator's own hand withered instantly.[247] In the end, the servant had to return to his mistress without his prize.[248]

The veracity of this story remains questionable. The position of the empress certainly carried prestige, and a monastery that wished to become an abode of miracle-working relics did well to include a *despoina* in its saint's portfolio. Interestingly, the punishment of the offender mirrors the ruling of the *Ecloga* of 726, which states that a poor robber should have his hand cut off.[249] In her recent study, Ekaterini Mitsiou suggested that Theodora, still secretly hoping to help her husband, desired the relics of his saintly namesake for the salvation of his soul.[250]

Founder of monasteries

During the reign of Andronikos II, ten new monasteries were established and twenty-two foundations were restored. Aristocratic and imperial women financed a number of these ventures, founding four new monastic houses and refounding nine older houses.[251] The empress became deeply involved in these pious efforts.[252] Besides her support of the aforementioned monasteries in Asia Minor, shortly after Michael's death, Theodora renovated and endowed the monastery of Lips.[253] (Situated in the Lykos Valley in west-central Constantinople, it included a hospital[254] surrounded by small houses[255] and owned six newly built mills.[256]) She

247 The text does not specify which of the men was maimed.
248 *St. Michel de Chalcédoine*, 163.
249 *Ecloga*, 17, n. 11. See also Kalavrezou (1997), 67, 76. Liz James shows that even the early Byzantine empresses invested in and showed reverence for relics. For details, see James (2001), 154 f.
250 Mitsiou (2016), 84: "(...) we may be right in assuming that despite her son's assurances she never stopped looking for a way to bring peace to her husband's soul. Perhaps the relic of an iconodule saint was thought a sufficient replacement for the ecclesiastical services and memorials of which Michael VIII was deprived." It may have been with similar motivations that Maria Angelina Palaiologina had herself and her first husband, Thomas Preljubović, painted in a scene depicting the story of doubting Thomas. Even though Thomas required (and received) proof of Christ's resurrection, he was saved in the end – a hope possibly expressed by the widow, regarding the eternal fate of her spouse. For details, see Agoritsas (2014).
251 For details, see Talbot (2001A), especially 332. For information on private religious foundations in late Byzantium, see Thomas (1987).
252 For an outline of Theodora's patronage, see Stethakopoulos (2011–2012), 394 f.
253 For general information and sources, see Kidonopoulos (1994), 86 f. For a description of properties, see Smyrlis (2006), 62 f.
254 Kidonopoulos (1994), 221 ff. Talbot (2001A), 336 f.
255 Kidonopoulos (1994), 186 f. Talbot (2001A), 337 f.
256 Kidonopoulos (1994), 206.

did the same for the nunnery dedicated to Cosmas and Damian known as the Anargyroi,[257] located close to St. Mokios Church[258] in Constantinople.[259] The Convent of Lips,[260] built at the beginning of the tenth century, originally comprised a church of the Theotokos and a hospital.[261] The empress began her reconstruction in haste,[262] most probably in order to prepare the new mausoleum for the burial of her daughter, Princess Anna (who died in 1301). Gradually, she added a new church of John Prodromos in the south (to the existing northern church, dedicated to Theotokos Panachrantos) and built a new hospital for women since the original hospital seems to have been completely destroyed. Lips then became home to a monastic community until the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453. In the second half of the fifteenth century, the southern church became a mosque called Fenari Isa Camii. The mosque has undergone various reconstructions but continues (with interruptions) to function as a place of worship to this day.[263]

The *Typikon of Lips*, which reflects similar documents of its kind (especially the one directed to the community of the Komnenian convent of Kecharitomene),[264] was written in Theodora's name by a ghostwriter[265] around the year 1300[266] or

257 Kidonopoulos (1994), 1–4. For details, see Talbot (1992), 301. For the source, see *AASS*, *Nov.*, 246–247. The monody of Theodore Metochites notes the empress's concern for monasteries. *Sideras, Grabreden*, 260. The Anargyroi monastery was also known as 'ta mikra Romaiou' (Kidonopoulos (1994), 1 f.).

258 Kidonopoulos (1994), 4.

259 The collection of *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents* (*BMFD*) offers a wide range of notes along with English translations of the rules and a comparison with contemporary documents of the same kind. For editions of the *typika*, see *Delehaye, Typica*, and *BMFD*, 1254–1286.

260 For further details, see *BMFD*, 1254–1286. *ODB* II, 1233. Macridy (1964), 253–278. *Majeska, Travellers*, 309–312. Megaw (1964), 279–298. Miller (1985), 201–204. Müller-Wiener (1977), 126–131. For further information and literature on the architecture of the convent, see Marinis (2009), 147.

261 *Preger, Patria,* 289.

262 In their study of the archeological remains of the foundation, Macridy *et al.* state: "(. . .) the main entrance is noticeably off axis. Everything shows great haste in the completion of the building, which was intended as the last dwelling-place of Theodora and members of her family." Macridy *et al.* (1964), 265.

263 For further details, see *BMFD*, 1254 f.

264 For a comparative study of the *typika*, see Galatariotou (1987). For a good introduction to the environment of late Byzantine convents, see Connor (2004), 268–308.

265 Talbot (1992), 299, fn. 40. As Dr. Talbot previously observed, a note in an eleventh century manuscript of Dionysios the Areopagite (*Vat. gr.* 1787, fol. 4v.) reveals that the manuscript was written at Theodora's command but not by her hand: "τυπογραφήσας προσταγῇ βασιλίδος/τῆς Δουκοφυοῦς εὐσεβοῦς Θεοδώρας/καὶ ταῖς μοναχαῖς ὡς χρεὼν ζῆν θεσπίας (. . .)." *Canart, Codices*, 135. *BMFD*, 1254, 1264, n. 6.

266 Nelson–Lowden (1991), 66. In respect to the dating of the document, the text clearly implies that at the time of its compilation, both her husband, Michael VIII (1282),

even as early as 1283–1285.[267] Nevertheless, it presents a consistent vision that is largely dependent on the empress's decisions, including the choice of *ephoros* as well as details regarding feasts and celebrations and the lands donated to support the convent. Whoever the ghostwriter was, he or she had to have worked very closely with the patron.

The rules Theodora compiled for her foundations offer some interesting insights into the life of a pious female community of her time. In the incomplete opening section, Empress Theodora appointed the emperor *ephoros,* or guardian, of the convent to defend the independence and possessions of the Lips community.[268] The priority she gives to this subject highlights the danger external exploitation posed to dependent monasteries, which could cease to exist for lack of funds. The nunnery was to house thirty choir nuns, who would serve in the sanctuary, and twenty ordinary nuns, who would see to the housekeeping. The novitiate could last from six months to three years, according to the age and circumstances of the novice.

The empress was also concerned about the social issues of her day. She stipulated that women who fell into misfortune could find a stable and honorable situation in her foundations, and she opened her convents to poor women, who could not bring with them any property. She also allowed nuns from other convents to enter her institutions if they agreed to obey her rules. In this way, she enabled not only the local poor but also refugees from Asia Minor who were fleeing the Turks to commence or resume monastic life.

In respect to the leadership of the convent, the nuns had to select their abbess from among the choir nuns within a week after her predecessor had died or left. The eldest of the four nunnery priests then brought the woman to the emperor, who invested her with the staff of the superior. Back in the convent, the nuns celebrated her inauguration with a feast. The founder strictly charged the nuns to obey the abbess in everything. However, if she transgressed against the rule or monastic discipline, the spiritual father, in agreement with the choir nuns, had the right to depose her. Other nunnery officials appointed by the abbess included the *sacristan*, who took care of the sacred books and vessels, the *ecclesiarchissa*, who prepared the church for ceremonies and equipped it with the necessary objects, the cellarer or the *assistant ecclesiarchissa*, who took care of victuals, and a gatekeeper, who monitored the comings and goings to and from the nunnery. While male monasteries could mostly refuse entry to women, convents were far from impenetrable to men. Lips thus employed a *steward*, who took care of the nunnery's landed property and who could, when necessary, enter the convent to discuss economic

and her daughter Anna (before 1301) were dead, and the heir of her son Andronikos II, Michael IX, was proclaimed (1281) or crowned (1294–95) emperor.

267 For new evidence for an earlier composition of the *typikon*, see Gkoutzioukostas (2009).

268 From the beginning, Andronikos supported the venture by providing 600 nomismata a year for the hospital. See also, Talbot (2001A), 338.

matters with the superior. Four priests also regularly came to Lips to celebrate the liturgy. A spiritual father listened to the struggles of the nuns, and a doctor came to treat the sisters when they were ill. Finally, singers were admitted so that they could perform for the emperor and his retinue during their annual visit on the 8th of September.[269]

The rule also comments on a number of practical, everyday issues, including food, liturgical life, leaving the nunnery and receiving visitors, illness, bathing, and clothing. A special chapter is dedicated to the performance of feasts and the decoration of the churches on these occasions. Theodora also offered privileges to her female relatives who might wish to become nuns in her foundation and expressed her wishes regarding the family mausoleum. The final section contains inventories of the property of both the nunnery and the hospital.[270]

As no other known female convent operated a hospital, this interesting institution, which probably provided care mainly for the poor, deserves to be mentioned here.[271] The hospital stood next to the convent and had beds for twelve patients (probably symbolic of the number of the apostles) and three staff members, who did not reside in the hospital. The patients regularly received mattresses and linens as well as appropriate clothing. Precise sums were allotted for the foodstuffs, drinks, and firewood necessary for their board and comfort. The personnel, which vastly outnumbered the patients, included a priest, three doctors, an assistant, a nurse, a head pharmacist and six attendants, two chief druggists, a bloodletter, three servants, a cook, and a laundress.

Though the *BMFD* claims that Theodora "became a nun in her own foundation,"[272] there is nothing to validate this claim in the rule or the other documents related to Theodora. Though at some point in her widowhood she became a nun, it seems that she never took up permanent residence in Lips. First, the text of the rule in no way suggests that at the time of its composition the empress had taken monastic vows. Not being a nun, she obviously could not become a regular member of the monastic community.

Also, the rule reveals that Theodora did not plan to become the superior of the community. In this respect, the *Lips typikon* contrasts strongly with the *typikon* composed for the Nunnery of Bebaia Elpis, whose founder, Theodora Synadene, became its first mother superior and made ample provisions for her residence as well as that of her daughter. Planning to assume the guidance of the Bebeia Elpis community, she concentrated considerable power in the hands of the abbess. Theodora Palaiologina's authority as it is described in the *typikon* (which always refers to her as 'my imperial majesty') was clearly based on her status as founder

269 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 195, fn. 559.
270 For an approximate value, see Weiss (1982), 90, n. 35.
271 The rule does not indicate that payment was made for the services received by the patients.
272 *BMFD*, 1254.

and empress and not on her being the abbess of the community. According to the empress's prescriptions, the mother superior of Lips was to be one of the choir sisters, educated and of noble origin. Moreover, she was to be "preeminent in wisdom and virtue,"[273] preoccupied with the nuns' salvation and informed about all their actions.[274] She had little authority otherwise. As far as the life of the community was concerned, she oversaw preparations (carried out by her officials) for the feasts[275] and made final decisions on minor issues, such as the bathing of sick nuns.[276] The financial matters of both convents were wholly in the care of the steward. It was up to him to decide whether he wanted the superior's opinion on the convent's economic affairs,[277] a formulation which indicates that financial matters were largely out of her hands. The post of *ephoros*, not specifically mentioned by the *Anargyroi typikon*, followed the rule of Lips, keeping the office (in both nunneries) safely in the hands of the founder's son, the emperor, and his descendants. The resolution to create a 'weak' abbess makes sense precisely if the founder did not wish to become the superior of her foundation. Though the leader of the convent had to be a virtuous and respectable noblewoman, the empress sought to prevent her from acquiring excessive power and wresting the institution from the grip of the Palaiologan family.

Another important clue that argues against Theodora's residence in Lips is the fact that the rule contains no special privileges for the founder. If she had decided to enter the convent and live there as a common nun, she would have had to submit herself to the authority of the abbess. In that case, however, she would have wished to safeguard for herself certain privileges: the ability to come and go at will, permission for the emperor and her other children to visit her, provisions for her servants, and requirements for special food and medical care. If she had wished to live intermittently in the convent without taking the vows (as other imperial women had done before her, including the famous Anna Komnene[278]), she would probably have specified the services she wished to receive from the monastic community. The *Lips typikon* details privileges for her daughters and granddaughters who would take up residence in the convent[279] but mentions none for Theodora – except the one regarding her burial place.[280]

Actually, the fact that the empress's body was carried to the convent represents one last argument against her long-term residence in Lips. Unless a procession

273 *Delehaye, Typica*, 109–110, ns. 5–7. *BMFD*, 1267–1268, ns. 5–7.
274 *Delehaye, Typica*, 111–112, ns. 9–10. *BMFD*, 1268, ns. 9–10.
275 *Delehaye, Typica*, 122–124, ns. 29, 32; 128, n. 39. *BMFD*, 1274–1275, ns. 29, 32; 1277, n. 39.
276 *Delehaye, Typica*, 125, n. 34. *BMFD*, 1276, n. 34.
277 *Delehaye, Typica*, 120, n. 26. *BMFD*, 1273, n. 26.
278 Neville (2016), 133–140.
279 *Delehaye, Typica*, 128 f., n. 40.
280 *Delehaye, Typica*, 130, n. 42.

around the city took place for ceremonial purposes, the transfer of Theodora's remains to the convent during a spell of bad weather suggests that she died in the imperial palace, where she probably also took her vows, and her body was subsequently taken to Lips for interment in her mausoleum.

The passage of time has obscured many of the details concerning the second of Theodora's Constantinopolitan foundations. The location of the Monastery of the Anargyroi[281] remains unknown.[282] In fact, little is known about its history except that its origins go back to the fifth century and that it was damaged in the course of the Latin occupation (after 1204). Theodora's plans for the reconstruction of this institution were probably interrupted by the premature death of Princess Anna, an event which forced the empress to focus on the rapid rebuilding of Lips and the inauguration of its mausoleum. Only after Lips was completed did the empress set in motion her plans for the Anargyroi.[283] In the introduction, which is incomplete, Theodora described how she rebuilt the convent, put a wall around it, and provided it with landed and material properties ('treasures'). The empress also supplied a rule which complemented the (now lost) rule of the original founder. Unlike Lips, Anargyroi housed a community before the empress became connected with it. Theodora's own rule informs us that the monastery's properties were scattered and the original *typikon* was preserved but largely ignored.

Theodora's rule for the Anargyroi represents a later and much shorter document than the one compiled for Lips. Its fragmentary nature reflects the fact that she did not wish to abolish the original rule[284] and that she planned for the abbess to follow the practical rules set up in the *Lips typikon*, of which the superior must have had a copy. One cannot but feel sorry for the nuns of the Anargyroi, who had to adjust their lives to the requirements set forth by three different rules! According to the empress's orders, Anargyroi was an independent institution that housed thirty nuns: eighteen choir nuns and twelve ordinary nuns. The nuns had a spiritual father to advise them and listen to their difficulties, two priests served liturgy in the convent church, and a steward took care of the landed property listed in the rule. The empress evidently wished Anargyroi to become a miniature of Lips, from which it differed solely in the number of resident nuns, the size and location of property, and the feasts celebrated. In Anargyroi the nuns celebrated

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281 The term 'Anargyroi' describes the two brothers-doctors, Sts. Cosmas and Damian, who treated their patients for free. The site of the former nunnery remains unknown. For details on the church, see Janin (1969), 285 f. Talbot (1992), especially 300. *BMFD*, 1287.

282 Berge Aran identified the site of the former nunnery with that of the *Atik Mustafa Pasha* Mosque (Aran (1977)). His theory, however, was refuted by Mathews *et al.* (1985), 134.

283 Theodora's change of plans is clearly set up in her rule. *Delehaye, Typica*, 137, 56. *BMFD*, 1291, n. 2.

284 *Delehaye, Typica*, 136 f., n. 55. *BMFD*, 1290 f., n. 1.

their patrons, Cosmas and Damian, and commemorated the original founder and his family as set up in his rule. Theodora wished for Lips and Anargyroi to be 'separate in unity'[285] with their abbesses and stewards meeting to discuss common concerns and offer one another advice on matters related to their responsibilities.

A mausoleum for the Palaiologan family

Preparing a resting place for one's family was a task commonly given to Byzantine women, and the preserved funerary chapels, poetries, sculptures and paintings bear witness to the contributions of the late Byzantine aristocracy.[286] Several empresses created family shrines and succeeded in gathering their relatives, who did not always get along, into one sacred space.[287] Empress Euphrosyne, the daughter of Emperor Constantine VI, established the Monastery of Lady Euphrosyne and had the remains of her father and her repudiated mother, Empress Maria of Amnia, transferred there. Similarly, the saintly Empress Theodora created a family mausoleum in the monastery known as ta Gastria. There, she gathered various family members and prepared her own tomb as well, ensuring that inasmuch as the family could not remain together in life, they would at least be united in death.[288]

Around the beginning of the fourteenth century, in a similar effort to gather her family in one place, Theodora Palaiologina chose the southern church of St. John the Apostle in Lips as the site of the new imperial mausoleum.[289] Her decision may have been guided by the site's proximity to the Church of Holy Apostles, which housed the older imperial mausoleum that had been destroyed by the Latins.[290] The still insecure position of the young dynasty in the wake of the controversy over the Union of Lyons may have been another motivating factor. In her *typikon*, Theodora welcomed members of her family to make her foundation their final resting place.[291] Excavations have revealed nine burial sites inside the church and eight located in the perambulatory. When the southern church of the Prodromos was converted into a mosque, the Turks removed the bones, destroyed tombstones bearing written inscriptions, and used the debris to fill in the twelve masonry tombs and two ossuaries in the church as well as the

285 *BMFD*, 1293, n. 7.
286 See, for example, Brooks (2006). Brooks (2007A).
287 See especially the intriguing study of Judith Herrin, Herrin (2002).
288 For details, see Herrin (2002), 292.
289 For a detailed study on the tombs and burials in Lips, see Marinis (2009).
290 For details on this foundation, see Macridy (1964), 258. Teresa Shawcross suggested that Theodora decided to establish Lips as the mausoleum of the Palaiologan dynasty after the remains of John IV Laskaris were buried in St. Demetrios of the Palaiologoi in Constantinople, the foundation of her husband. For details, see Shawcross (2008), 221.
291 *BMFD*, 1278 f. On the importance of family members living together in a monastic community, see Garland (2013).

six tombs in the lateral narthex.[292] The only grave which remained untouched was located in the northern church, facing the tombs of the rest of the family. It contains the remains of a man buried without pomp, apparently a monk. As the grave was placed in the area reserved by the founder for her eldest son, Andronikos, who indeed died a monk, Macridy, Megaw, Mango, and Hawkins, who conducted a thorough investigation of the site in 1963, believed the grave to belong to this emperor.[293]

Although the material evidence has been lost, based on written sources it is still possible to reconstruct the identity of the family members buried in the mausoleum. The first to be buried in Lips was Princess Anna, who died before 1301. Soon afterwards, the mausoleum received the founder herself (d. March 1303); her mother Eudokia, whose date of death remains unknown but who was to be buried next to the empress; and her son Constantine (d. May 1306), who was interred in a peripheral area of the mausoleum due to his unresolved conflict with Andronikos II.[294] Princess Eirene disappears from the written sources after 1307, but the precise date of her death and the location of her burial place remain unknown. Theodora's daughter Eudokia, who died in Trebizond on December 13, 1301, was probably buried in Asia Minor.[295] Among later members of the Palaiologan family, the following three found their final resting place in Lips: Eirene-Adelheid, the first wife of Theodora's grandson, Andronikos III (d. August 1324); the founder's son, Andronikos II (d. February 1332);[296] and the first wife of John VIII, Anna of Moscow, who died of the plague in August 1417.

The nun Eugenia

While the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* notes that Theodora became the nun Eugenia, the year in which the empress took her vows remains uncertain. The event may be broadly placed to sometime after the death of her husband in December 1282 and before her own death in February 1303. In the *Lips typikon*, dated to about 1300, the empress is never referred to by her monastic name, and the text describes her solely as 'my imperial majesty,' a 'mistress,' and 'empress' (*despoina*). If Theodora had taken her vows by the time this document was written, the *typikon* would certainly have acknowledged her new status. As this is not the case, it would seem that Alice-Mary Talbot was correct in asserting that Theodora took the veil shortly before her death.[297] The fact that her monastic name appears only in the *Synodikon*

292 Macridy et al. (1964), 269. For further information on the location of the burial places of Theodora and her family, see Marinis (2009), 161–165.
293 Macridy *et al.* (1964), 271.
294 *Pachymeres* IV, 467 (XI,22).
295 Macridy *et al.* (1964), 270, fn. 56a.
296 *Gregoras* I, 463 (IX,14).
297 Talbot (1992), 302.

of Orthodoxy,[298] where it was inscribed after her death, further suggests that she spent most of her widowhood dressed in the robe of an empress. Theodora apparently never permanently resided in her foundation (as argued above) but died as a nun in the palace, from which her body was carried to the imperial mausoleum in Lips.

Death

Empress Theodora died after a brief illness on February 25, 1303,[299] and the burial ceremony followed nine days later. Despite the winter storm that was raging in Constantinople that day,[300] the empress's burial was celebrated with appropriate magnificence. Crowds of the poor to whom she had extended her generosity over the course of her life filled the streets. The emperor himself abandoned his duties and matters of state in order to organize a splendid procession that included throngs of aristocracy, clergy, monks, and citizens, all bearing lights and moving to the accompaniment of melodies and dirges. Pachymeres describes the doleful atmosphere of the day when incense, singing, and lamentations filled the city. The emperor himself walked in the mud, touching the coffin of his mother until they entered the Monastery of Lips, where a solemn celebration, forty days in length,[301] took place in his presence.[302] They buried Theodora in a tomb she had prepared for herself several years before her death,[303] which was located next to that of her mother at the site indicated in the *Lips typikon*, probably one of the niches of the south aisle.[304] During the celebration, Theodore Metochites, the *megas logothetes* of Andronikos II and a celebrated scholar, wrote and apparently performed the *Monody on the Empress Theodora, the Mother of the Emperor*,[305] which praises her piety, patronage, generosity to monasteries, and philanthropy toward the poor.

According to the recent research of Vasileios Marinis, Theodora's remains as well as those of her mother and possibly her daughter Anna were removed

298 *Gouillard, Synodikon*, 101.

299 *Pachymeres* IV, 412, fn. 21. The scholars differ in regard to the date of Theodora's death. According to DuCange (DuCange (1680), 234) and Millet (*Millet, Inscriptions*, 118 f., n. 359), she died on February 16, 1304. Papadopoulos (Papadopoulos (1938), 4, ns. 1, 15), Ševčenko (Ševčenko (1975),140, 277 ff), and Polemis (Polemis (1968), 109, n. 74) argue that she was buried on March 4, 1303.

300 *Sideras, Grabreden*, (Theodore Metochites, Μονῳδία ἐπὶ τῇ βασιλίδι Θεοδώρᾳ, τῇ τοῦ βασιλέως μητρῖ), 260.

301 *Pachymeres* IV, 412, fn. 24.

302 *Pachymeres* IV, 413 (XI,4).

303 *Sideras, Grabreden*, 259: "Σὺ μὲν γε πρότερον οὐκ ὀλίγοις ἔτεσιν ἅπαντα πρὸς τὴν ταφὴν ἐσκευάζου καὶ μνήματά σοι καὶ περιταφίους στέγας, οἷα δὴ νομίζεται, καὶ ἔπιπλα κατατύμβια καὶ δεήσεις ἐν γράμμασι· καὶ τί γὰρ οὐ τῶν εἰωθότων."

304 *Delehaye, Typica*, 130, 42. Talbot (1992), 300. Albani (1991), 113.

305 *Sideras, Grabreden*, 249–267. *Vindobonensis phil.* gr. 95, 179r–189r.

from their original burial sites. At some point, they were taken from the tombs and placed in an ossuary.[306] In the fifteenth century, they were removed from the church altogether when the building was transformed into a mosque.

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While many details of her life and facets of her personality remain shrouded in uncertainty, Empress Theodora emerges as a woman of excellent character, who was possessed of many interests and amazing stamina. In respect to her private life, she was willing to take risks in order to promote the welfare of her family and household. As a wife, she helped her husband re-establish the imperial court of Constantinople. As a founder, she made a lasting imprint on the renovated city through the refounding of two convents. Through her patronage of books and icons, she participated in the revival of cultural life that occurred during the Palaiologan era. Though rarely directly involved in political affairs, her actions following the death of her husband (signing the *Confession of Faith* and generously supporting her foundations) certainly helped stabilize the position of the Palaiologan dynasty, shaken as it was by the association with the Union of Lyons. Finally, Theodora was also involved in practical charity as she opened her foundations to women without possessions, offered free medical care to sick women, and ordered food to be handed out in her convents on the patrons' feast days. Of all the late Byzantine empresses, Theodora was certainly the one who left the largest cultural heritage and the only one who became an important founder, patron, and philanthropist. Although often in the shadow of the strong personality of her husband, there is no doubt that Theodora was a conscious successor of the great Byzantine empresses of the Komnenos, Angelos, and Laskarid dynasties. Inspired by their lives and practices, Theodora, through her own life and example, bequeathed their legacy to later empresses of the Palaiologan era.

306 Marinis (2009), 165 f.

II Anna of Hungary: The Beloved Augusta (1272–1281)

> *(…) the tomos of the church, which is read every year at the pulpit in the presence of the church, to acclaim and commemorate in a sacred way those who lived in Orthodoxy, if it bears the names of other empresses who did not have the same virtues as she, it takes absolutely no notice of her (…).*[307]
>
> Andronikos II Palaiologos

Historical background[308]

By 1272, it was time for Andronikos II,[309] the eldest son of Michael VIII and Theodora, to marry. Aware of the imminent danger of a new crusade against Byzantium and eager to show his favorable disposition toward the Catholic Church, Michael favored a Latin daughter-in-law. Nevertheless, the search for a suitable bride[310] proved challenging. After Charles of Anjou, Michael's most determined enemy, conquered Sicily in 1266, negotiating for Italian brides became difficult.[311] There could be no agreement with Castile either because of the king's fear of papal excommunication. Eventually, Michael turned to the Kingdom of Hungary, a desirable ally due to its influence in the Balkans.[312]

In order to understand Anna's background, it is necessary to know something of the medieval history of this unique kingdom. Hungary had a long history of political and church-political interactions with the Byzantine Empire.[313] In the middle of the tenth century, Hungarian leaders requested missionaries from

307 *Pachymeres* IV, 515 (XII,2). Translation mine.

308 Anna died shortly before her father-in-law; therefore, her time in Byzantium coincides with the period marked by the negotiations for an ecclesiastical union with the Catholic Church as described in the previous chapter. For further details on this period, see Nicol (1972B), 99–159. Zástěrová *et al.* (1996), 304–307. See also Laiou (1972).

309 *PLP*, n. 21436.

310 For the circumstances surrounding the search for Andronikos's bride, see *Pachymeres* II, 411 ff. (IV,29). Laiou (1972), 27.

311 *Pachymeres* II, 411 f. (IV,29).

312 *Pachymeres* II, 411 f. (IV,29). See also Nicol (1972B), 99.

313 For further details on the history and culture of the Hungarian Kingdom in the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, see Kontler (2001), 40–70. Clewing–Schmitt (2011), 69 ff., 78–85, 94–97, 100 f., 127–131.

Byzantium and converted to Christianity; however, subsequent relations with Byzantine emperors were strained, leading the Hungarians to form closer religious ties with the West. This predilection was sealed when Prince Gejza was baptized by a Western prelate, Bruno of St. Gallen, in 973. His son Stephen, later St. Stephen, received royal insignia from Pope Silvester II and was crowned king in the year 1000. Stephen built up an ecclesiastical network of eight bishoprics and two archbishoprics, thereby making an important step towards converting the Hungarian masses to Christianity. Like most Hungarian kings, he was in close contact with Byzantium and was an ally of Emperor Basil II. Almost a century later, King Gejza I (1074–1077) married a relative of another Byzantine emperor, Michael VII Doukas. To mark the occasion, the emperor sent Gejza a splendid crown that would later become part of the Crown of St. Stephen, the only legitimate coronation crown of the Hungarian kings. In 1103, the son of Alexios I Komnenos, the future John II, married Piroška, the beautiful daughter of Ladislaus I, who received the name Eirene on her arrival in Byzantium.

Another interesting episode demonstrates a later connection between the two states, this time between King Bela III of Hungary and Emperor Manuel I Komnenos. As a young duke, Bela had schemed against his brother, King Stephen III, and eventually had to flee to the Byzantine court. There he was re-baptized, assuming the name Alexios, and became the emperor's protégé. At one point, the emperor (who at that time did not have a male heir) even engaged Bela-Alexios to his only daughter, Maria, proclaiming the Hungarian prince his heir in 1165. However, in 1169, Bela's imperial ambitions were crushed when the second wife of the emperor, Maria of Antioch, gave birth to a baby boy, who would later be known as Alexios II. Bela was then married to Manuel's sister-in-law, Anna-Agnes of Chatillon. In the course of his stay in Constantinople, Bela received a thorough classical education and was well trained in the art of statecraft. When Stephen III died in 1172, Bela returned to his kingdom and went on to become one of Hungary's greatest kings. Following the usurpation of the Byzantine throne by Andronikos I, Bela joined in the opposition that rose up against the usurper, who had ordered the political murders of Manuel's daughter, wife, and son (among others). After the death of Bela's wife (c. 1184), the Hungarian king resolved to realize Manuel's dream of uniting Hungary and Byzantium by marrying the only surviving member of the emperor's family, his sister Theodora.[314]

Ultimately, neither union ever materialized. The Hungarian legates who came to Byzantium seeking Theodora's hand arrived shortly after the *coup d'état* of Isaac II Angelos (1185). The new emperor did not yet feel politically secure enough to grant their request, but he did not waste the chance for an alliance with a powerful neighbor. Being a widower, he requested a bride from Hungary and soon afterwards (1185–1186) married Margaret, the daughter of Bela III and Agnes of

314 For details on this union, planned by Manuel, see Moravcsik (1933).

Chatillon, who became Empress Maria, one of the most influential and interesting Byzantine empresses of foreign origin.[315]

Returning to the Palaiologan period, the last Hungarian-Byzantine imperial marriage took place in the second part of the thirteenth century when Michael VIII decided to wed his heir, Andronikos, to Anna of Hungary. Their union was prompted by Michael's desire to prevent a dangerous Sicilian-Hungarian coalition: in 1269, the son of Charles I of Anjou[316] had married Maria, the daughter of the Hungarian king Stephen V. Furthermore, the Hungarian crown prince, Ladislaus, had become the husband of Charles's daughter Isabelle. Despite the cold calculations of the senior emperor, the marriage of Andronikos and Anna was a happy one – even if it did not bring great political advantage to either realm.

Anna's early years

In the mid-thirteenth century, the strength of the Hungarian state was cruelly tested by the armies of Batu Khan, who conquered Kiev in 1240 and decimated the Hungarian army on the Muhi River the following year. King Bela IV (1235–1270), Anna's grandfather, had to flee from the battlefield but spent the next several years reorganizing the Hungarian army, as well as the country's defense systems and infrastructure, in order to discourage further Mongol invasions.[317] Soon afterwards, military conflicts with the Bohemian king, Přemysl Otakar II, destabilized the country, which became even further divided following a devastating civil war between Bela IV and his son, Stephen V.

It was during this time of general insecurity and conflict that the future Byzantine empress was born (1260), the youngest of the five daughters of Stephen V and Elisabeth the Cuman. Little is known about her early life except that her grandfather and aunt took Anna and her siblings captive along with their mother in 1264. The future empress presumably spent her early years in the company of her sisters, who were soon sent away to become the wives of foreign princes: Catherine wedded Stephan Dragutin of Serbia, Mary became the wife of Charles II of Anjou of Sicily, another sister (whose name remains unknown) was allegedly betrothed to Jacob Svetoslav of Bulgaria, and Elisabeth became a nun and prioress before she was kidnapped by her brother Ladislaus and wed to the powerful Bohemian nobleman, Záviš of Falkenstein.

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315 For Margaret-Maria's story, see Malamut (2018).

316 On the Union of Lyons and related events, see Geanakoplos (1959), chs. 11 and 12. Riebe (2005). Nicol (1972B), 58–61. Blanchet (2003). Hussey (1986), 225–235. Nicol (1961). Nicol (1971). Nicol (1962). Salaville (1947). Roberg (1964). Wolter–Holstein (1966). Meyendorff (1971), 58–61. See also the preceding chapter on Theodora Palaiologina.

317 Clewing–Schmitt (2011), 95 f.

The Byzantines were reasonably well informed about the Hungarian ruling family. Pachymeres correctly noted that the Laskarid princess [Maria][318] bore the Hungarian king [Bela IV] a son [Stephen V], who later married a Cuman lady [Elisabeth the Cuman], a woman of great beauty, who won the heart of the young prince.[319] George Akropolites, in turn, mentions that Maria was the second daughter of the Nicene emperor, Theodore I Laskaris, whom the emperor "gave to the king of Hungary, in marriage for his son, when the former was passing through his land on his return from Jerusalem."[320] The granddaughter of a Laskarid princess, Anna of Hungary[321] was deemed a suitable bride for a Byzantine emperor.[322] In selecting Anna, Michael may also have hoped that her relationship to the former imperial dynasty would appease the Nicene aristocracy, who had been upset by his treatment of the Laskarid offspring.[323]

At the end of 1271 (or the beginning of 1272), Michael VIII sent an embassy to Hungary, led by the ex-patriarch Germanos (III) and the *megas doux*, Michael Laskaris, who was the brother of Theodore I Laskaris and thus a relative of the future empress.[324] Little else is known about the embassy except that the legates traveled by land[325] and soon escorted the twelve-year-old Hungarian bride to the Byzantine court.[326] Their expeditious return indicates that the marriage negotiations had actually been concluded earlier. In fact, as early as July 1271, Hungarian sources mention Andronikos II as the son-in-law of the king (*Andronicum, iuniorem imperatorem Graecorum, generum nostrum*).[327] Failler suggested that the dealings between the two courts regarding the marriage had begun as part of the Byzantine-Hungarian negotiations of 1269,[328] which took place under Anna's formidable grandfather, Bela IV (d. 1270).[329] Their objective

318 For details on Maria's life in the West, see Dabrowska (2001), especially 173 ff.

319 See *Pachymeres* II, 411 f. (IV,29). I could not identify the source of this romantic tale. The unusual marriage of Stephen V is commonly explained by Bela IV's need to secure control over the Cuman tribes.

320 *Akropolites*, 26 (15). (Trans.) *Macrides, Akropolites*, 148 (15), see also n. 2, p. 149. The Hungarian king, Andrew II, stopped in Nicea in 1217–1218 on his return journey from the Fifth Crusade.

321 *PLP*, n. 21348. Moravcsik (1958), II, 70.

322 *Pachymeres* II, 411 (IV,29): Ταύτην ὡς εὐγενῆ καὶ ἐκ τῶν Λασκαρίων καταγομένην συναρμόττειν ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐβούλετο τῷ υἱῷ.

323 John IV Laskaris, the last Laskarid emperor of Nicea, was blinded in 1261 at the order of Michael VIII, who then married John's younger sisters off to insignificant foreign aristocrats.

324 *Dölger, Regesten*, 110, n. 1982.

325 *Pachymeres* II, 413 (IV,29), see l. 11.

326 *Pachymeres* II, 413 (IV,29).

327 *Codex Arpadianus* VIII, 254. *Actes de Gregoire X*, 3, ns. 4,6.

328 *Codex Hungaricus* VIII, 96.

329 Failler (1981B), 186.

was to frustrate the plans of Charles I of Anjou, who had concluded an anti-Byzantine treaty in Viterbo in 1267.

Anna in Byzantium

Since Anna came to Byzantium by land,[330] her welcome presumably took place at the Monastery of Theotokos tes Peges, where she was dressed in the imperial purple and met her fiancé and father-in-law for the first time. She would also have been proclaimed empress as was prescribed by the ceremonial of *Pseudo-Kodinos*.[331] On her arrival at the Byzantine court, a Catholic princess would normally have converted to Orthodoxy.[332] The fact that the sources do not mention this event in connection with Anna does not mean that it did not occur. Considering the anti-Latin atmosphere in the city at the time, it is certain that the historians would not have failed to comment if Anna had maintained her confession.[333] Without her conversion, her marriage to an Orthodox emperor would have required a special dispensation, and her participation in religious ceremonies would have been limited.

Another moot question is related to the princess's birth name, which is not revealed in the sources. Foreign brides of non-Orthodox confession normally received a new name on their arrival in Byzantium. As Pachymeres reports, "Michael conferred upon her the name 'Anna' according to the Byzantine custom."[334] Even though the historian's observation suggests that the princess went by a different name in Hungary, it is possible that Anna was, in fact, her baptismal name. Stephen V and his wife Elisabeth gave their female children 'international' names. (The three elder daughters were called Catherine, Elisabeth, and Maria.) Nor was 'Anna' an uncommon name in Hungary. The daughter of Andrew II (1177–1235), who married Ivan Asen II of Bulgaria, was named Anna as was a daughter of Bela IV. If the name of a foreign princess appeared in the Byzantine calendar, she was allowed to keep it, as the case of a later empress, the Serbian Helena Dragaš, indicates. As neither Pachymeres nor any other source mentions the original name of the daughter of the Hungarian king, it is possible that it was 'Anna' and that Michael merely allowed the young princess to keep her name.

330 *Pachymeres* II, 413 (IV, 29). See also, e.g., Papadimitriu (1902), 453.
331 For details as well as sources on these ceremonies, see the final part of this study. *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 266 (XII).
332 On conversions of Latins, see Mitsiou (2018).
333 Professor Dabrowska claims that Anna did not change her confession and remained Catholic. For details, see Dabrowska (1996), 91. See also Dabrowska (2008), 43. The same opinion was recently expressed by Leszka–Leszka (2017), 63.
334 *Pachymeres* II, 413 (IV,29).

The co-empress

In the spring or summer of 1272, Anna married Andronikos in what Pachymeres calls a 'magnificent ceremony,'[335] performed by Patriarch Joseph I in Hagia Sophia (Ill. 2). On November 8th of the same year,[336] the young couple was crowned in the presence of the imperial family, the aristocracy, the clergy, and the people. In the course of the grand and joyous feast, Andronikos II swore that he would honor the church[337] and its privileges and protect to his best ability the life and imperial office of his father.[338] In turn, he received the usual oath and acclamation of the people. The patriarch and his officials inscribed these pledges into the holy books and swore loyalty to Andronikos.[339] Michael VIII then conferred on his son the privilege of signing his name in red, though without a *menologem*,[340] as 'Andronikos from the grace of Christ emperor of the Romans.'[341] The young couple also received a small court retinue of their own to which three officials[342] were assigned, and Andronikos received an imperial scepter to hold during religious ceremonies.

The timing of the coronation was apparently prompted by the internal situation of the empire and by Michael's desire to secure the throne for his descendants. Insight into the emperor's motivation once again transpires from the account of Pachymeres. Following his description of the imperial wedding, he mentions that Michael revoked the privileges of his brother John, a famous general.[343] Michael's reputation had already been weakened by his treatment of John IV Laskaris and the patriarch Arsenios, not to mention his pro-Unionist policies. It would seem that the emperor had now grown jealous of his brother's success and may have feared that if he should die first, his brother could circumvent Andronikos in a bid for the throne.

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335 *Pachymeres* II, 413 (IV,29). *Gregoras* I, 109 (IV,8). For further notes, see Failler (1981B), 184–192.

336 *Pachymeres* II, 413 (IV,29). *Gregoras* I, 109 (IV,8). *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 75. Pachymeres and Gregoras claim that the coronation took place 'in the following year,' which clearly does not mean 1273 but after September 1, 1272, which marked the beginning of the Byzantine year. The embassy bringing Anna thus arrived in Constantinople in late winter or early spring. The wedding took place in late spring or summer, and the coronation followed on November 8, 1272 (in the following year from the perspective of the Byzantine authors).

337 *Dölger, Regesten* III, 145, n. 2070.

338 *Dölger, Regesten* III, 145, n. 2071.

339 Gregoras also mentions these oaths. *Gregoras* I, 109 (IV,8). *Pachymeres* II, 415 (IV,29).

340 A dating formula, consisting of month and indiction, which serves as a signature. For details, see *ODB* II, 1341. For Michael's privilege, see *Dölger, Regesten* III, 116, n. 1995.

341 *Gregoras* I, 109 (IV,8).

342 The names of these officials were Libadarios, Bryennios, and Tzamplakon. For details, see *Pachymeres* II, 413 (IV,29), see also fn. 7.

343 For further argumentation and details on this subject, see *Pachymeres* II, 435 f. (V,1).



Ill. 2: *Hagia Sophia, the site of the weddings and coronations of the late Byzantine empresses. (Photo: Navid Serrano). Original title: View of Hagia Sophia at Sunset. Author: Navid Serrano. URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hagia_Sophia#/media/File:Hagia_Sophia_2017.jpg. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)*

Despite the magnificence surrounding her marriage and coronation, Anna's first years as empress were not easy. Her father died suddenly in 1272 after only two years of independent rule, which may have diminished Anna's importance at the Byzantine court. Even though her brother was still heir to the Hungarian Kingdom, as the husband of Isabelle of Anjou, there was a possibility that he could be persuaded to join his father-in-law in plotting against Byzantium. The beginning of the young empress's marriage was also marked by Michael's growing concern for his own power. After securing the position of his son against any possible incursion by his brother, Michael apparently began to fear that Andronikos might rebel against him or that his son's popularity could eclipse his own. In response to these doubts, he soon revoked Andronikos's privilege of carrying the scepter during the Divine Liturgy, arguing that a symbol of supreme power could not be held by two people.[344] In this relatively trifling incident, one gets a sense of the tension, suspicion, and insecurity that must have overshadowed the happiness of the young co-emperor and his wife.

344 *Pachymeres* II, 415 (IV,29).

The miracle of St. Euphrosyne the Younger

Anna's position was further complicated by the fact that she did not immediately produce an heir to the throne. The *Vita of Euphrosyne* noted that Anna, a princess "of most spectacular birth and beautiful in the body," could not conceive and so kept the emperor without a child and the empire without an heir. She allegedly sought the intervention of doctors without success until she heard of the miraculous powers of St. Euphrosyne the Younger and turned to her in prayer.[345] As may be expected, the saint did not disappoint Anna's hopes: after anointing herself with oil from the lamp at Euphrosyne's tomb and binding the silken threads from the saint's coffin around her hips, she was immediately able to conceive.[346] Such practices were often performed by Byzantine women (and men), who frequently sought healing at the graves of the saints, anointing parts of their bodies with the oil kept there, sleeping close to the tomb, or touching objects the saint had once owned.[347] While miraculous accounts may not be completely trustworthy sources of information, it is quite possible that after six years of childlessness, in keeping with local customs, the empress sought the saint's aid so that she could give her husband a successor.[348] In any event, her prayers were heard, and Anna gave birth[349] to the future emperor, Michael IX, on Easter Day of 1278.[350] Sometime later she bore Andronikos another son, who was baptized Constantine.[351] Besides

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345 There is something curious about this story, nevertheless. The sources reveal that an icon of the Virgin, famous for her ability to heal infertility, was stationed at the Blacherns Church of the Theotokos. (For a miracle attributed to this famous icon, see, for example, *PG* 100, 1076B–D, 1080 A (J.-P. Migne, ed.), Herrin (1994), 197 or Panou (2011–2012), esp. 133). Why did Anna (and her successor, Eirene-Yolanda) have to go to St. Euphrosyne to beg for a child when there was a miraculous icon right in the Blacherns Palace? Did the healing specialization of the Blachernitissa change in the late medieval period, or did St. Euphrosyne require famous patients to build her reputation? The fact that the empresses did not turn to the Blachernitissa suggests that the icon had ceased to be known for healing infertility by the late Middle Ages.

346 *Vita S. Euphrosynae*, 875, n. 38.

347 For further information, see especially the works of Alice-Mary Talbot, including especially Talbot (1983A). Talbot (1994A). Talbot (1997).

348 Alice-Mary Talbot considered it improbable that Xanthopoulos would have been able to invent such a story about a recent empress. For details, see Talbot (1997), 11 f. For further details on St. Euphrosyne, see Talbot, (2002), 167.

349 *Gregoras* I, 167 (VI,2).

350 *PLP*, n. 21529. *Pachymeres* III, 99 (VII,33). Anna died when Michael was three years old. His life will be further described in the chapters related to his stepmother, Eirene-Yolanda of Montferrat, and his wife, Maria-Rita of Armenia.

351 *PLP*, n. 21499. Anna's younger son became a despot in 1294. His father later made him the governor of Valona in Albania (1319). In 1321–1322, he also briefly held Thessalonike against his nephew, Andronikos III, on his father's orders. Andronikos,

securing the future of the Palaiologan dynasty, by seeking the aid of an Orthodox saint (not to mention having her request miraculously granted), Anna managed not only to increase the prestige of St Euphrosyne but also to provide proof that her conversion to Orthodoxy was sincere.

Anna and the Prodromos Monastery on Mount Menoikeion

Like Theodora, whom Anna must have known well and who may have helped to educate the young empress and prepare her for her imperial role, Anna also published at least one decree in favor of a monastic institution, the Monastery of the Prodromos on Mount Menoikeion[352] near Serres in Macedonia. Unfortunately, her original *horismos* has been lost, but in his decree of August 1312, Andronikos II remembers the order issued "by my late, beloved *augousta*, lady Anna the empress" who ordered the *pronoiarios,*[353] George Troulenos, to return the land called *ton Libadon*, which he had illegally appropriated, to the original owner (the Monastery of the Prodromos). The fact that a new imperial order was issued suggests that Troulenos briefly complied with the original order but reoccupied the property after the empress's death.[354] Andronikos, probably at the request of the Prodromos monks, confirmed his wife's decision and ordered his courtiers, George Strategos and Nicholas Theologites, to make sure that the land was returned. To prevent further problems of this kind, the two officials were then to pass the decree on to the representatives of the monastery. As Barišić noted, Anna acted autonomously for her part in the arbitration of this conflict.[355] The fact that the monks' first plea for assistance was made directly to the empress suggests that she owned property in Macedonia or had a special connection to St. John the Baptist (in Greek 'Prodromos').

In Asia Minor

When Michael VIII recalled his brother, John Palaiologos, from his post in Asia Minor in 1272, Turkish pressure on the eastern border of the empire intensified. In 1280, in response to the escalation in tensions, Michael sent an army (led by his nephew, Michael Tarchaneiotes) to block the Turkish progress. Andronikos was ordered to accompany the army on this expedition, and Empress Anna was

however, captured Constantine in 1322, mistreated him, and imprisoned him in Didymoteichon. The despot became a monk that same year and died in 1334/5.

352 For details on the monastery, see *ODB* II, 1340 f.

353 For details on this institution, see *ODB* III, 1733 f.

354 For the edited text of the document and for commentary, see *Acts de St. Jean Prodrome*, 46–48, n. 5.

355 Barišić (1971), 158, 197.

at his side. It was not primarily a military venture for the young couple.[356] Besides participating in armed encounters, Andronikos apparently planned to settle in the region for some time to create a semblance of imperial presence in Asia Minor and perhaps to keep an eye on the pro-Laskarid aristocracy as well. Angeliki Laiou wrote that the young emperor went "to restore the people's morale by his protracted presence (. . .), to bring armies and money into the area, and to make the region safe by rebuilding forts, towns, and villages along the frontiers."[357] Yet another reason for the move may have been that the jealous and suspicious nature of Michael VIII prompted him to remove his heir from Constantinople, where Andronikos could be persuaded to join the growing anti-Unionist opposition.

After Andronikos had rebuilt and repopulated the city of Tralles (Aydin),[358] the couple settled in Nymphaion. [359]The sources preserve little information about Anna's life in Asia Minor. In a speech to the Orthodox clergy, Andronikos remembers her as the defender of the persecuted anti-Unionists: "My speech now turns also to my first wife, who so hated that which was happening at the time that she violently cursed *protosebastos* Nostongos, who because of the decisions [the Union] was maltreating the dissidents [anti-Unionists[360]/Arsenites[361]] in the East (. . .)."[362] Andronikos reveals that Anna witnessed firsthand the persecution of the anti-Unionist and pro-Laskarid opposition organized by Michael Nostongos,[363] which may actually have been part of the imperial assignment. The sources do not explain how the empress, who was born Catholic and grew up at a pro-Union Byzantine court, became connected with the anti-Unionist movement. She may have been converted by some of her female in-laws, or perhaps she merely sympathized with the victims of Nostongos's cruelty.

The political situation gradually deteriorated as Charles of Anjou began his attack on the Byzantine Empire. In late 1280, he dispatched a large army to Albania under Hugo le Rousseau de Sully. The army moved quickly through Albanian territory, and by the end of the same year, it had besieged the imperial fortress of Berat.[364] Michael rapidly gathered an army of his own and sent it to Macedonia (March 1281), where the soldiers achieved a brilliant victory: the general was taken

356 *Pachymeres* II, 593 (VI,20).
357 Laiou (1972), 24.
358 *Pachymeres* II, 591–599 (VI,20 f.). The city was destroyed between 1280 and 1284, see *Pachymeres* II, 598, fn. 2. See also Laiou (1972), 24–25. Situated on a hill and without direct access to water, Tralles was soon captured by the Turks, who killed all its inhabitants.
359 *Pachymeres* II, 599 (VI,21).
360 See *Pachymeres* IV, 514, fn. 37.
361 See *PLP*, n. 20726.
362 *Pachymeres* IV, 515 (XII,2). Translation mine.
363 *PLP*, n. 20726.
364 *Pachymeres* II, 643–653 (VI,32–33). See also Geanakoplos (1959), 329–334.

captive and his army was scattered.[365] The emperor then embarked on an extended military expedition to Asia Minor. Considering the heightened military tensions, he apparently wished for Andronikos to hold Constantinople in his absence.[366] In the spring of 1281, Andronikos was recalled to the capital to govern the western part of the empire in his father's stead.[367]

Death concealed

It is not known why Anna did not accompany Andronikos to Constantinople. She may have been ill or expecting another child, or perhaps she believed his absence would be brief. It is also possible that she was planning to join him later. Whatever the case, husband and wife never met again. The empress died soon after Andronikos's departure in June 1281.[368] Her elder son, Michael, was only three years old at the time while Constantine was a mere infant. Anna's death was reported to Michael VIII, who decided to withhold the information from his son and ordered that the empress's body be transported to Nicea. There, Patriarch John XI Bekkos and his dignitaries, hastily summoned to Asia Minor, buried Anna with all of the customary pageantry in the absence of her husband.

Despite his father's efforts to conceal the tragic news, Andronikos soon learned of his loss, which caused him great pain (according to the chronicler's report).[369] He apparently returned to Asia Minor as soon as he could to mourn his wife but arrived too late to attend the burial; in fact, he met the patriarch returning from Nicea on his way.[370] Michael VIII may have felt guilty for forcing his son to leave his beloved (and possibly ill) wife and was clearly anxious to comfort Andronikos. The senior emperor now deprived his younger son, Constantine the Porphyrogennetos, of the right to wear purple[371] (a privilege he had exercised until then), thereby confirming once and for all Andronikos's position as successor. He also had his grandson, Michael (IX), proclaimed emperor "in order to console his father [Andronikos II] severely afflicted by the death of the empress."[372]

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365 *Pachymeres* II, 648–653 (VI, 32–33). See also Laiou (1972), 23.
366 Michael VIII didn't return to Constantinople until the summer of 1282.
367 *Pachymeres* II, 627 (VI,27).
368 According to *Pachymeres* III, 98, fn. 29, Anna died on June 28, 1281. See also *Pachymeres* II, 627 f. (VI,27–28), 629 fn. 5. Her death may have been the result of giving birth to her second son, but considering the fact that Anna, her father (Stephen V), her son (Michael IX), her grandson (Andronikos III), and her granddaughter (Anna) all died suddenly and prematurely, it is possible that this branch of the Hungarian royal line suffered from a health condition.
369 *Pachymeres* II, 631 (VI,28).
370 *Pachymeres* II, 631 f. (VI,28).
371 *Pachymeres* II, 631 (VI,28).
372 *Pachymeres* III, 99 (VII,33).

Even though late Byzantine historians have no objections to Anna's person or her character, the Hungarian princess is one of the six late Byzantine empresses who do not appear in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*.[373] In a speech captured by Pachymeres, Andronikos notes that Anna

> (...) died in the middle of these events [under the Union of Lyons][374] and was not purified from this communion by means of penitence. Also, not having received the appropriate funeral rites, she did not obtain commemoration in the following years of my reign, and the *tomos* of the church, which is read every year at the pulpit in the presence of the church, to acclaim and commemorate in a sacred manner those who lived in Orthodoxy, if it bears the names of other empresses who did not have the same virtues as she, it takes absolutely no notice of her alone,[375] and that during my life and under my rule![376]

Because the young empress died before the Union of Lyons was abolished (1283), she did not have the opportunity to reject the agreement and adequately repent of her involvement (however passive). Moreover, her burial was performed by a Unionist patriarch in an 'un-Orthodox' fashion, so she remained under the anathema pronounced over the Unionists. Based on this fact, Patriarch Gregory II refused to include Anna's name in the *Synodikon* after her death,[377] and Andronikos could not transfer her body from Asia Minor to the Palaiologan mausoleum in Lips where he himself was later buried.

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Anna of Hungary was the first foreign princess to marry a Palaiologan emperor. Her nine years in the empire did not leave any great imprint on late Byzantine history; nevertheless, she issued at least one document in support of a monastic institution and, despite her initial difficulties, bore her husband two sons. Although she exercised no great political influence over the empire, Anna, who was apparently a rather private and tender person, seems to have been a great support and comfort to her husband. Her successor, Eirene-Yolanda of Montferrat, differed from her in nearly every respect.

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373 *Gouillard, Synodikon*, 101. The 'Eirene of Hungary' mentioned in the footnotes of the *Synodikon* (*Gouillard, Synodikon*, 101, fn. 340) does not indicate Anna of Hungary but Eirene-Yolanda of Montferrat, the second wife of Andronikos II.

374 *Pachymeres* II, 628, fn. 5, 629 (VI,28). See also *Pachymeres* III, 139 (VIII, 5). *Gregoras* I, 167 (VI,2).

375 Anna was indeed the first Palaiologan empress not inscribed in the *Synodikon*. When he delivered his speech, the emperor could not have known that she would be followed by five other imperial consorts.

376 *Pachymeres* IV, 515 (XII,2). Translation mine.

377 *Pachymeres* III, 139 (VIII,5).

III Eirene-Yolanda of Montferrat: *Mère Politicienne*[378]

(1284–1317)

> *She also wanted something unheard of; the imperial rule was no longer to be a monarchy, as is customary by the Romans. No, she wanted to divide the cities and the territories of the Romans according to the Latin custom and every territory was to be ruled by one of her sons as his personal inheritance and possession.*[379]
>
> Nikephoros Gregoras

Introduction

The widowed Andronikos was not allowed much time to mourn his beloved wife. Shortly after Anna's[380] death in 1281, Michael VIII began an earnest search for another suitable daughter-in-law. His legates turned first to the court of Peter III in Aragon to request the hand of the king's daughter for the emperor's son.[381] Unfortunately, the promising negotiations came to an abrupt halt when Michael VIII died in December 1282. Eager to establish his position as ruler after the death of his unpopular father, Andronikos decided to cancel the Union of Lyons, which had caused such division within Byzantium. For Peter, already anathematized by the pope,[382] this was a dangerous development. While the Union remained valid, he may have considered the alliance, but after Andronikos[383] revoked it, the king decided not to risk further trouble with the Roman Curia by giving his daughter to a renegade emperor.[384]

378 Barišić (1971), 197.

379 *Gregoras* I, 234 (VII,5).

380 Anna of Hungary, for details, see the previous chapter.

381 This marriage figures in the treaty between Michael VIII and Peter of Aragon in 1281, see *Dölger, Regesten* III, 74 f., n. 2059.

382 Peter III of Aragon was related by marriage to the House of Hohenstaufen, which ruled Sicily until the year 1266, when Charles I of Anjou killed Manfred of Sicily in the Battle of Benevento and became king in his stead. Along with Michael VIII, Peter supported the uprising in Sicily known as the Sicilian Vespers, which destroyed most of the Angevin forces preparing to conquer Constantinople in 1282.

383 For information on Andronikos's rule, see Zástěrová *et al.* (1996), 304–307; Nicol (1972B), 99–159. For insight into Andronikos's politics and reign, see Laiou (1972).

384 For details, see Cognasso (1927), 39.



Ill. 3: *The Countryside of Montferrat. (Photo: Piedmont Properties). Original title: A landscape in Montferrat: view from San Marzano Oliveto, Astesan Montferrat, towards Monviso. Author: Piedmont Properties. URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montferrat#/media/File:Monviso_from_San_Marzano_Oliveto.jpg. Lincence: CC BY-SA 3.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)*

Following this setback, Andronikos approached Alfonso X of Castile.[385] This king was also fearful of the repercussions of an alliance with Byzantium, so he responded in a Solomonic manner, offering Andronikos the hand of his young granddaughter, Yolanda (Jolanta), without requesting the permission of the Curia as was customary.[386] Yolanda of Montferrat,[387]born in 1272/3, was the daughter of William VII of Montferrat,[388] the titular king of Thessalonike, and Beatrice of Castile. William was a Ghibelline and had already been excommunicated by Pope

385 *Dölger, Regesten* IV, 3, n. 2087.
386 *Gregoras* I, 168 (VI,2). See also Laiou (1972), 45, fn. 47.
387 *PLP*, n. 21361. Constantinidi-Bibikou (1950), 425–442. Nicol (1996), 48–58. Diehl (1906), 226–245. Runciman (1959), 27–34. Laskaris (1926), 70–76. Nicol (1972B), 121.
388 For details on William VII, see *Gregoras* I, 168 (VI,2). Buchon (1860), Liste II. Constantinidi-Bibikou (1950), 427.

Gregory X, so he obviously did not mind upsetting the successor of St. Peter a little more.[389]

The young empress

Yolanda grew up in Montferrat (Ill. 3), a region in northwestern Italy that had been elevated to a margravate of the Holy Roman Empire in the tenth century. Comprising mountains in the south and hills in the north, Montferrat was famed for its wines. Its margraves had political ties to France and repeatedly participated in the Crusades.

Very little is known about Yolanda's life in Montferrat, which she left when she was about twelve years old. Her father was probably frequently called away from home in his constant struggles against other Italian lords, and the young princess would have been left in the care of her mother. She may have spent some of her time with her brother John and perhaps also with her half sister, Margaret, the daughter of her father from his first marriage to Isabella de Clare. Besides Italian, Yolanda may have learned Spanish from her mother as well as Latin, the language of the educated class of her day. She apparently also knew French, which would be to her advantage much later during her reign in Thessalonike when she was the head of a court of her own and led political negotiations with the (mainly French) Latin lords who had settled in the region.

The sources do not mention further details concerning the marriage negotiations. In the next reference to Yolanda, the young girl had set sail for Constantinople, accompanied by three Genoese ships that had been equipped at the expense of the commune.[390] On her arrival in Byzantium in 1283/4, she received the name Eirene and converted to Orthodoxy.[391] In 1284, she married Andronikos II, who was twenty-four or twenty-five by that time.[392] Patriarch Gregory of Cyprus celebrated the wedding of the imperial couple in Hagia Sophia while the empress-mother, Theodora,[393] became the sponsor of the marriage.[394]

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389 For further details, see Dabrowska (1996), 23 f. On the religious aspect of the marriage, see Nicol (1961), 170 f.

390 *Auriae, Annales*, 310 f. For further sources, see Laiou (1972), 70, fn. 57.

391 Gregoras claims that her name was Eirene (*Gregoras* I, 168 (VI,2)). As Eirene's name figures in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* (although the editor of this document introduces her as 'Eirene of Hungary,' confusing her with her predecessor, Anna), it is clear that she did convert to Orthodoxy on her arrival in Byzantium. *Gouillard, Synodikon*, 101.

392 According to Gregoras, Andronikos was twenty-three at this time. Nevertheless, as he was born in 1258 and Yolanda arrived in 1283 at the earliest, the emperor must have been older than indicated by the chronicler. *Gregoras* I, 168 (VI,2). Also see Failler (1999), 233.

393 *PLP*, n. 21380.

394 Pachymeres noted that the dowager empress "accepted the [wedding] crowns." *Pachymeres* III, 101 (VII,33). For further interpretation of this convoluted text, see

The young princess initially made a good impression on the Byzantine court. Gregoras describes Yolanda as "pretty, well-mannered and of a beautiful face."[395] Pachymeres presents her as a lady "of noble birth and manners."[396] Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos calls her "beautiful and blessed."[397] The marriage seemed advantageous to both parties: Yolanda brought her fiancé not only an alliance with a powerful Western house traditionally opposed to the Angevins (who were dangerous enemies of the Palaiologan dynasty) but also the Montferrat claim to the Kingdom of Thessalonica.[398] In return, the emperor agreed to pay Yolanda's father a large sum of money and promised to maintain five hundred Lombard knights in William's retinue.[399]

Saint Euphrosyne, a child, and the coronation

The *Vita of St. Euphrosyne* mentions that Eirene (as the new empress came to be known to her subjects), like her predecessor, had difficulty conceiving. Nevertheless, after she had completed the necessary rituals at the tomb of St. Euphrosyne, she "gave the emperor many beautiful children."[400] Though Anna had indeed remained barren for several years following her wedding and thus may have needed the saint's assistance, Eirene gave birth to her eldest son as early as 1286, which does not suggest an anomaly in her reproductive health.

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fn. 32. Apparently, senior emperors and empresses often became the wedding sponsors of their children. *Panaretos* mentions that the senior emperor Alexios I of Trebizond carried the crown for his son Manuel at the latter's wedding. For details, see *Lampsides, Panaretos*, 78. For a detailed discussion of this passage in Pachymeres, see Failler (1999), 226–230.

395 *Gregoras* I, 168 (VI,2). Unfortunately, unlike other late Byzantine empresses, no image of Eirene has been preserved. The portrait of her daughter Simonis in Gračanica Monastery in Serbia may reflect some of the famous beauty of her mother.

396 *Pachymeres* III, 101 (VII,33).

397 Papadopoulos-Kerameus (1902), 44.

398 *Memoriale Potestatum*, col. 1165. For a detailed discussion, see Laiou (1972), 44–46. Nicol (1972B), 120 f. *Dölger, Regesten* IV, n. 2098. Constantinidi-Bibikou interprets this concession as a sign that William had preserved certain territories in Macedonia until this time (Constantinidi-Bibikou (1950), 426).

399 *Annales Veronenses*, 428. Mas Latrie (1887), III, 63–66. Cognasso (1927), 39, fn. 5.

400 *Vita S. Euphrosynae,* 875 f. Alice-Mary Talbot considered it improbable that Xanthopoulos would be able to invent a miracle story about a recent empress. For details, see Talbot (1997), 11 f. For further details on St. Euphrosyne, see Talbot, (2002), 167. As in the case of Anna of Hungary, there is a minor complication. The sources reveal that the Blacherns church housed an icon of the Virgin Blachernitissa, allegedly a famous healer of infertility (see, for example, *Vita S. Stephani Iunioris*, 1076B–D, 1080A. Herrin (1994), 197). Nevertheless, Eirene did not turn to her which seems to suggest that by the late medieval period, the Blachernitissa had ceased to be known for healing infertility.

John's birth played an important role in Eirene's "career" at the Byzantine court, for Andronikos did not crown her at their wedding but only after she became a mother. The sources do not explain the delay. The emperor may have considered his bride too young to be crowned, or perhaps he was simply not yet ready to elevate her to the position of his beloved first wife. In the years that followed, the couple had another six children together although their parental joy was intermittently veiled by sorrow. Besides John (*1286),[401] Theodore (*1291),[402] Simonis (*1292–1293),[403] and Demetrios (*1294),[404] who were mentioned by Gregoras,[405] Eirene also gave birth to Theodora,[406] Isaac,[407] and Bartholomew,[408] all of whom died in infancy.[409]

Asia Minor

In 1290, Andronikos and Eirene moved their court to Asia Minor, where the emperor's presence was needed to reinforce the defenses of the cities and villages and to bolster the morale of the populace.[410] Two vignettes, captured by contemporary chronicles, provide a glimpse into the empress's stay in the region. In February 1293,[411] the empress gave birth to a baby girl. The newborn was weak, and an experienced midwife advised the imperial couple to bring twelve icons of the apostles and burn candles of equal height and weight in front of each of them while the clergy and those present sang prayers. The candle in front of the

401 *PLP*, n. 21475. John must have been born in 1286 and not 1288, as suggested by Cognasso (Cognasso (1927), 41), or even 1289, as indicated by Failler (Failler (1999), 234 f.), because Gregoras tells us that Eirene was only crowned after the birth of her son John. Furthermore, a marginal note in *Vaticanus* 641 from September 18, 1286, introduces her as an empress crowned by God, and a *Praxapostolos* of Batopedi dated to May 28, 1287, also describes her as 'Εἰρήνη ἡ εὐσεβεστάτη ἡ Αὐγούστη.' Treu (1972), 21. As the title *augousta* was used exclusively for crowned empresses in late Byzantium, it can be assumed that John was born sometime before September 18, 1286. John is also mentioned in a poem by Manuel Philes, see *Manuelis Philae Carmina inedita*, n. 7, 16.

402 *Manuelis Philae Carmina inedita*, n. 7, 16. *PLP*, n. 21465.

403 *Manuelis Philae Carmina inedita*, n. 7, 17. *PLP*, n. 21398.

404 *PLP*, n. 21456. On Eirene's children, see *Gregoras* I, 234 (VII,5). On their dates of birth, see Cognasso (1927), 41.

405 *Gregoras* I, 234 (VII,5).

406 *Manuelis Philae Carmina inedita*, n. 7, 16. *PLP*, n. 21375.

407 *Manuelis Philae Carmina inedita*, n. 7, 17. *PLP*, n. 21473.

408 *Manuelis Philae Carmina inedita*, n. 7, 17. *PLP*, n. 21440.

409 On Eirene's children, see also Failler (1999), 231. The poem by Manuel Philes mentions the children in the following order: John, Simonis, Theodoros, Theodora, Isaac, Demetrios, Bartholomew. *Manuelis Philae Carmina inedita*, n. 7, 16 f.

410 See also Laiou (1972), 76–84.

411 *Pachymeres* III, 302, fn. 12.

image of St. (Simon) Peter burned the longest; therefore, the princess was baptized Simonis.[412]

The second occurrence involves a scandal that took place in Eirene's antechamber on the Feast of the Holy Apostles (October 6). An elderly relative, known as the Strategopoulina, offended Eirene's sister-in-law,[413] the wife of Constantine the Porphyrogennetos, when she refused to show the younger woman the honor due her higher social standing. Constantine's revenge for this slight to his wife escalated a previous conflict between the two brothers.[414] While Eirene doesn't seem to have played any part in this affair, the incident confirms that she performed her official duties even when absent from the capital.

Strife and coronations

In his chronicle, George Pachymeres explains that the emperor married a daughter of a mere marquis because he already had an heir.[415] Although Andronikos's difficulties in finding a bride must have been primarily connected with his revocation of the Union of Lyons, it is also probable that the fathers of the potential brides were well aware of the fact that there was little chance of seeing their grandchildren rule the empire. Nevertheless, Eirene proved to be an ambitious mother. Not of illustrious origin herself,[416] she apparently desired above all else that her children ascend to the highest possible positions.[417] Jealous of her stepsons, Michael IX and Despot Constantine, who were only a little younger than herself, the empress allegedly wished

> (. . .) that her children and her children's children would inherit the rule of the Romans [Byzantines]. (. . .) She also wanted something unheard of; the imperial rule was no longer to be a monarchy, as is customary for the Romans. No, she wanted to divide the cities and the territories of the Romans according to the Latin custom, and every territory was to be ruled by one of her sons as his personal inheritance and possession. Each of them would receive a territory from his father, just as riches and possessions pass from father to son among the common people, and the son would, in turn, give it to his children and heirs.[418]

While Nikephoros Gregoras considered this a Latin practice, the system certainly had little to do with Western feudalism. In reality, though the features he described

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412 For the text, see *Pachymeres* III, 305 (IX,32).
413 Eirene Raoulaina, the wife of the emperor's brother, Despot Constantine Palaiologos (also known as the Porphyrogennetos).
414 *PLP*, n. 21398. *Pachymeres* III, 173 f. (VIII,19). For details on the conflict between Andronikos II and his brother, see the biographical chapter on Theodora Palaiologina.
415 *Pachymeres* III, 99 f. (VII, 33).
416 *Gregoras* I, 203 (VI,9).
417 See also Nicol (1972B), 159 f.
418 *Gregoras* I, 233 f. (VII,5).

reflect the feudal system to a certain extent, the empress's plan would not have appeared sound to any Western ruler. Primogeniture was well established in the West by the year 1000, and no king or emperor would have willingly divided lands that had often been painfully conquered and maintained to make them into completely independent principalities for their (younger) children.

Unmoved by her pleading and pouting,[419] Andronikos was determined to see the empire pass to his elder son from his first marriage. On their return from Asia Minor, he had Michael (IX) crowned on May 21, 1294.[420] Possibly to mollify his wife, he elevated their eldest son, John, to the honor of despot the following day.[421] It is doubtful that this concession placated Eirene for long. Around the same time,[422] the emperor bestowed the title of despot on his second son, Constantine, highlighting his dynastic preference for Anna's children, a circumstance that must have caused further grief in his second marriage.

Eirene and the Arsenites

While little is known about Eirene's life in the last decade of the thirteenth century, a curious phrase in the chronicle of Pachymeres suggests her possible involvement in the Arsenite affair,[423] which was explained in detail in the first chapter of this study. Andronikos's decision to repeal the Union in 1283 and the synod of Adramyttion in the spring of 1284 had done little to resolve the controversy. In fact, under the patriarchates of Gregory II of Cyprus, Athanasios I (1289–1293, 1303–1310),[424] and John XII (1293–1303), the Arsenite issue had grown increasingly problematic.

Pachymeres states that, following efforts to reconcile with the Arsenites in 1296, Andronikos released the leader of the party's radical wing, John Tarchaneiotes, and "allowed his wife the empress to show him kindness and care for him according to his wishes."[425] Unfortunately, the chronicler does not specify the nature of this 'care,' nor does he reveal how an empress of Western origin came to be

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419 Gregoras describes Eirene's methods of persuasion in very strong terms. For details, see *Gregoras* I, 234 ff. (VII,5).

420 *Pachymeres* III, 219 f. (IX,1). For details on the coronation of an emperor, see *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 210–242. (VII).

421 *Pachymeres* III, 221 f. (IX,2). For details on the coronation of a despot, an event which apparently took place in the imperial palace, see *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 244 f. (VII).

422 *Pachymeres* III, 201 f. (VIII,26). The sources mention that this took place after he married the daughter of the *protovestiarios,* Theodore Mouzalon, who did not live to participate in the wedding. As Mouzalon died in March 1294, Constantine became despot later that year or soon afterwards.

423 On the Arsenite schism, see Tinnefeld (2012).

424 For succinct information on Athanasios and his reforms, see Meyendorff (1964), 20–25.

425 *Pachymeres* III, 235 (IX,7).

interested in an ardent opponent of her husband. Nevertheless, the fact that the emperor 'allowed' Eirene to minister to John rather than 'requesting' her cooperation suggests that the young empress was acting on her own initiative. Her motivation remains unclear. She may have wished to assist her husband in ending the Arsenite controversy, or she may have been influenced by her in-laws, the daughters of Eirene-Eulogia and Maria-Martha Palaiologina, who were deeply attached to the Arsenite cause. A third explanation is that she was trying to find yet another way to put pressure on her beleaguered husband. This last possibility is the most probable, considering that it was around this time that the conflict between husband and wife began to escalate. Following this episode, the sources do not offer any further evidence of Eirene's involvement with the Arsenites, leading to the conclusion that she did not become a prominent member of the movement.[426]

The wedding of Simonis

The Byzantine Empire suffered extensive territorial losses at the hands of an expanding Serbia during the 1280s. At that time, Serbia was ruled by the formidable tsars of the Nemanja dynasty, who gradually built up a large state in the western part of the Balkan Peninsula. Macedonia eventually fell under the control of Stephan Uroš II Milutin,[427] who made his capital in Skopje, annexing territories down to Kavala and acquiring control over northern Albania by conquering another strategic city, Dyrrhachion. In the interests of peace (and desirous of securing his northwestern border), the emperor offered Milutin the hand of his sister, who had returned from Trebizond in June 1298[428] after the death of her husband. While the king was enthusiastic in his acceptance of the proposal, Eudokia rejected the alliance,[429] leaving Andronikos no other choice but to sacrifice his only daughter to his politics, along with the territory already conquered by the Serbians as her dowry. In February 1299, Simonis (for her image as a grown up woman see Ill.4) celebrated her sixth birthday; when winter ended,[430] the imperial family left for Thessalonike to attend her wedding.[431]

426 The Arsenite schism ended under Patriarch Niphon in 1310 when a plot against the emperor was uncovered in the Mosele Monastery. A good diplomat, the patriarch used the difficult situation of the Arsenites to reconcile them to the Orthodox Church.

427 On the relationship between this Serbian tsar and Byzantium, see Piltz (2011). On the situation in Serbia and the Nemanja dynasty, see Pelikán–Havlíková–Chrobák *et al.* (2004), 62–70.

428 *Gregoras* I, 202 f. (VI,9). *Pachymeres* III, 299 (IX,29), 300, fn. 9. *Lampsides, Panaretos*, 63.

429 *Pachymeres* III, 303 (IX,30).

430 *Pachymeres* III, 305 (IX,33).

431 *Pachymeres* III, 303 (IX,31), IV, 307 (X,1). See also Nicol (1972B), 126.

In the late Middle Ages, Serbia was no longer considered a barbaric country although Byzantine sources continued to describe it unfavorably. Its proximity to the empire had a strong influence on the Serbian state, which had begun its rise to power with the ascent of the Nemanja dynasty, founded by Stephan Nemanja (1166–1196) and his sons Stephan Prvověnčani, who received the royal crown in 1217, and Sava, who became archbishop of an autocephalous Serbian state in Nicea two years later. Besides political growth, Serbian culture flourished as well. Members of the Raška school of architecture built a number of beautiful monasteries (including Studenica, Sopočani, Gradać and Arilje) while Archbishop Sava oversaw the translation of the works necessary for the life of the church and Serbian society, including the Byzantine collection of canon laws (*Svetosavska krmčija*). At the same time, Serbian authors were also composing their own texts, mainly hagiographies, which were especially popular with their readers. In fact, Stephan Prvověnčani and St. Sava each authored a version of *The Life of St. Simeon*, which detailed the life of their father and created a basis for his cult, strengthening the prestige of the dynasty.

Such were the ancestors of the Serbian king, Stephan Uroš II Milutin, who was to become the husband of the six-year-old Byzantine princess. The emperor claimed that the separation from Simonis had caused both of her parents great pain,[432] but Eirene did not protest overmuch the unequal match even though the king was nearly forty-five years old and did not have a very good record as a husband. The Byzantine court was well aware that Milutin had had at least three wives,[433] all of whom he eventually repudiated. The silence of the sources regarding Eirene's

432 *Pachymeres* IV, 323 (X,9). Ursula Bosch believed that Eirene struggled violently against the marriage. Unfortunately, she did not offer any evidence in support of her opinion. See Bosch (1965), 85.

433 There is great confusion regarding Milutin's wives, part of which concerns whether Elisabeth of Hungary was his wife or a lover. Pachymeres (*Pachymeres* III, 301 (IX,30); IV, 307 f. (X,1)) states that Stephan Uroš II Milutin had an affair with Elisabeth, who was the sister of his wife Catherine and also of Anna, the deceased wife of Andronikos II. In reality, Catherine was Milutin's sister-in-law, the wife of his brother. Gregoras (*Gregoras* I, 203 (VI,9)) and several Western sources (see Failler (1997), 239–244), on the other hand, claim that Elisabeth was Milutin's third wife and was later repudiated by her husband. In fact, this same princess became a Dominican prioress on Rabbit Island in 1277. She was later kidnapped by her brother, Ladislaus V, and married to a Bohemian nobleman, Záviš of Falkenstein in 1288. It is therefore probable that Elisabeth was not married to Milutin but, as Pachymeres claims, had some sort of liaison with him during a stay at the Serbian court (while visiting her sister Catherine). For an analysis of the sources which favor the version put forth by Pachymeres, see Failler (1997). For the argument, refuted by Failler (*ibid.*), that Elisabeth was Milutin's wife, see Maksimović (1996). A new analysis by Elisabeth Malamut (Malamut (2000)) has brought fresh perspective to the problem. She shows that Milutin was married to a noblewoman called

opposition to the union suggests that her idea of a good marriage did not involve love so much as a throne.[434] She was apparently hoping that Simonis would rule a kingdom, one which her grandchildren would then inherit. For this reason, protests against the marriage came not from the parents of the young girl but, paradoxically, from the patriarch (John XII),[435] who considered the union uncanonical, and from the principalities of Bulgaria and Thessaly, who feared an alliance of their powerful neighbors.[436]

The imperial family and the greater part of the Byzantine court arrived in Thessalonike (which had been under direct Byzantine rule since 1246) sometime before Easter 1299,[437] which fell on April 19 that year, and the wedding took place at the end of the same month. Fearing a trap, the *kral*[438] requested that the bride be exchanged for hostages (Milutin's third wife, who was the daughter of the Bulgarian tsar, and the Byzantine fugitive general Kotanitzes[439]) in the middle of the Vardar River. The two retinues faced off on opposite banks, and several boats were put into the water. When Simonis reached the western shore, she received the blessing of Patriarch Makarios of Ochrid and proceeded to the *kral*, who welcomed her by stepping down from his horse and receiving her, in the words of the historian, "as his sovereign and not merely as a spouse."[440] The wedding ceremony, which is not mentioned in the sources, probably took place in Thessalonike.[441] Empress Eirene certainly witnessed these events and participated in the festivities the emperor had organized for the Serbian king and his

Jelena of Thessaly, who died prior to his marriage to Simonis. His marriage to the Thessalian princess must have been very brief and may not even have been consummated. Milutin then married Anne Terter, the sister of the Bulgarian king, only to abandon her in favor of Elisabeth of Hungary. It seems their union took place after 1292 but was never recognized by the Serbian church as the princess was a sister-in-law of the king. In 1299, the king married Simonis Palaiologina, who, as the daughter of the emperor, lent great prestige to her husband. As the couple had no children together, a son from his first marriage succeeded him on the Serbian throne.

434 For the empress's lack of protest, see Gill (1985), 41 f.

435 See *Pachymeres* IV, 307 f. (X,1), 311 f. (X,2), 323 f. (X,9). Laiou (1972), 100.

436 See Laiou (1972), 98.

437 Eirene's presence is recorded by Pachymeres (*Pachymeres* IV, 307 (X,1)).

438 The Slavonic equivalent of "king," which the Byzantine sources often use for the Serbian ruler.

439 The handing over of these hostages was agreed upon well in advance of the wedding. See *Pachymeres* IV, 313 f. (X,3–4). *Gregoras* I, 202 f. (VI,9).

440 For a full description of the account, see *Pachymeres* IV, 315 (X,4).

441 The chronicler claims that the little princess was first blessed by the patriarch and only then approached the king. While a protracted celebration was not appropriate, the wording of the source does not imply that the wedding took place by the Vardar River.



Ill. 4: *The portrait of Simonis Palaiologina in Gračanica Monastery, Serbia. (Photo: Orjen). Original title: Simonida Nemanjić Simonis Palaiologina Gračanica Monastery. Author: Orjen. URL: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Simonida_Nemanjić_Simonis_Palaiologina_Gračanica_Monastery.JPG. Lincence: CC BY-SA 3.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)*

new queen.[442] After a protracted stay in Thessaly, the imperial court returned to Constantinople on November 22, 1300.[443]

442 *Pachymeres* IV, 315 (X,5). *Gregoras* I, 204 (VI,9).
443 *Pachymeres* IV, 319 f. (X,8), 320, fn. 43. Laiou (1972), 99.

Eirene and the marriage of her son John

With her daughter safely ensconced on the Serbian throne, Eirene began to pursue her ambitious plans for her sons.[444] As Barker pointed out,[445] the empress's desire to make each of them the ruler of an independent principality had nothing to do with her being well-informed about the feudal system,[446] nor was it a completely new idea. Gregoras himself tells of Michael VIII's planning to create a separate principality for his third son, Constantine the Porphyrogennetos.[447] Neither was the concept wholly foreign; sending the younger imperial sons to administer a territory became a common practice in late Byzantium.[448] It is possible that, as her sons grew, Eirene became increasingly desperate to secure for them what she considered an adequate situation. At first, she allegedly tried to exploit Andronikos's love for her and badgered him day and night. When it became clear that her husband would not be moved, she attempted emotional blackmail and even tried to trade sexual favors in return for Andronikos's acquiescence to her demands. Eventually, her behavior alienated the emperor, who separated himself from his wife in private, all the while maintaining appearances in public in order to avoid a scandal.[449]

Temporarily frustrated in her ambitions, Eirene turned to supporting her daughter and son-in-law,[450] sending rich gifts to Serbia in the hope that her grandchildren would one day use them to conquer the Byzantine Empire. For several years, she sent crowns adorned with precious stones to Milutin, each piece more magnificent than the last. Even so, all her hopes came to nothing when, as Angeliki Laiou put it, "as a result of his [the kral's] own haste in consummating the union, he never did have any offspring from his Byzantine marriage."[451]

Around 1301, the emperor promised to marry Eirene Choumnaina,[452] the daughter of his prime minister (*mesazon*), Nikephoros Choumnos, to his nephew,

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444 Constantinidi-Bibikou describes in detail Eirene's matrimonial plans for her children (Constantinidi-Bibikou (1950), 429–431). Gill (1985), 42 f.

445 For further details, see Barker (1971), 103–22.

446 Ostrogorsky (Ostrogorsky (1956), 343 (German version)) and Constantinidi-Bibikou (Constantinidi-Bibikou (1950), 428) develop Gregoras's opinion, claiming that Eirene wished to introduce Byzantium to the feudal system she had observed in Lombardy as a child. Nicol (Nicol (1996), 50 f.) does not consider this view plausible in light of Eirene's tender age on her departure from the land of her birth.

447 *Gregoras* I, 187 (VI,6).

448 For a thorough examination of this problem, see Barker (1971).

449 *Gregoras* I, 234 f. (VII,5).

450 *Gregoras* I, 243 ff. (VII,5). For further details on the relationship between Eirene and Milutin, see Mavromatis (1978), 59–66.

451 Laiou (1972), 96.

452 *PLP*, n. 30936. For a detailed biographical study on Eirene Palaiologina Choumnaina, see Hero (1985), on her marriage, see especially p. 120 f. Also see Laurent (1930), especially p. 40 ff.

Alexios II of Trebizond. After the groom emphatically rejected this proposal,[453] Andronikos decided to marry the lady, who was known for her wealth and beauty, to his own son, John. The empress was strongly opposed to the alliance,[454] which she did not consider exalted enough for her eldest. She intended to have John marry Isabeau de Villehardouin, who was the heiress of the principality of Achaia (three times widowed and of an advanced age[455]) or the young Thamar of Epiros.[456] Andronikos stood firm, claiming that the will of the father superseded that of the mother, and John was married to Eirene Choumnaina. The wedding took place in the early spring of 1303, shortly after the death of Empress Theodora, the mother of Andronikos II.[457] The ceremony was a simple one due to the recent demise of the empress-mother and out of respect for Empress Eirene, who departed for Thessaly immediately after the wedding.[458]

453 *Pachymeres* IV, 317 f. (X,7).

454 *Gregoras* I, 240 f. (VII,5). *Pachymeres* IV, 317 f. (X,7), 413 f. (XI,5), see also fn. 26. The wedding took place around Easter 1303, which fell on April 7 of that year.

455 *Pachymeres* IV, 319 (X,7); for details on Isabeau, see *ibid.* 318, fn. 41. *Gregoras* I, 240 (VII,5). Despite the empress's opposition to the marriage, the couple were betrothed (*Pachymeres* IV, 413 (XI,5). In a letter to the emperor, Patriarch Athanasios mentions the imperial couple's dispute regarding the marriage of their eldest son (*Laurent, Regestes*, appendix n. 8, 574).

456 *Gregoras* I, 240 (VII,5). See also *Van Dieten* I, 290, ns. 414, 415.

457 February 25, 1303. *Pachymeres* IV, 413 (XI,4). For further details on her death, see Chapter I.

458 *Pachymeres* IV, 413 f. (XI,5). Curiously, the text does not mention whether Eirene Palaiologina Choumnaina accompanied her husband to Thessalonike. Elisabeth Malamut expressed the opinion that Eirene left with her husband (for details, see Malamut (2003), 267). As the sources do not contain any reference to her living there or returning from there, it is possible that she remained with her parents while she waited for her mother-in-law to become reconciled to the marriage. Sometime later, perhaps towards the end of 1304, John returned to Constantinople and became the eparch of the city (*Pachymeres* IV, 545 (XII,11)). On the other hand, Eirene's family owned large properties in Macedonia, and her father had acted as governor of Thessalonike in the last decade of the thirteenth century (see Malamut (2003), 264 f.). The young bride may have lived in Thessalonike at one time, so moving there temporarily would not necessarily have inconvenienced her mother-in-law. John's presence in the capital is corroborated by external evidence. In the middle of December 1304, Berenguer d'Entença requested the prince as a hostage to guarantee his own security in Constantinople (*Pachymeres* IV, 545 (XII,11)). In his study, Sideras expressed the opinion that Eirene Choumnaina accompanied her husband and mother-in-law to Thessaly. Unfortunately, he does not substantiate his claim (Sideras (1982 reprint. 1994), 275).

Thessalonike: independent court or honorable exile?

Byzantium, and more specifically Thessalonike, had a common history with Montferrat, the details of which are rather tedious but necessary to understanding Eirene's claims on the city. Under the rule of the Komnenos dynasty, Renier of Montferrat married Maria, the daughter of Manuel I, and received the title of *caesar* in 1180. Boniface of Montferrat, one of the leaders of the Fourth Crusade and Renier's brother, became king of Thessalonike in 1205, but he was ambushed and killed by the Bulgarians two years later. His son, Demetrius of Montferrat, then ruled the kingdom until 1224 when Thessalonike was conquered by Theodore Komnenos Doukas, the ruler of Epiros. Forced out of his principality, Demetrius fled to the court of Frederick II of Sicily. Towards the end of his life, he ceded his rights to Thessalonike to Frederick. Margraves of Montferrat nevertheless maintained claims to the capital of Thessaly, which (as mentioned above) contributed to the selection of Yolanda of Montferrat as the bride of Andronikos II.

Following the separation of Andronikos and Eirene, the situation of the empress must have become increasingly awkward. Frustrated in her ambitions, disappointed in her marriage, and wanting to be closer to her daughter and son-in-law,[459] Eirene decided to take up residence in Thessalonike,[460] which she considered her ancestral domain. Once there, she could govern Thessaly and perhaps find a way to bring her plans to fruition.[461] Andronikos accompanied his wife for part of her journey,[462] and he also gave Eirene large properties in western Macedonia to be inherited by their children.[463] He even dispatched his trusted servant, Theodore

459 See the *Autobiography* of Theodore Metochites in: *Metochites*, 20, v. 722.

460 The *Chronicle of the Morea* claims that the empress became the godmother of one of Andronikos's illegitimate sons and that, as such, the patriarch had decided she could not have intercourse with the father of the child. (*Livre de la Conqueste*, 358 f., art. 911.) This assertion is easily disproved by the observations of Gregoras, the silence of the Greek sources regarding Andronikos's having fathered illegitimate *sons*, and the character and temper of the empress (who would hardly have accepted such a role).

461 For the testimony of Theodore Metochites regarding the objectives of the empress, see Ševčenko (1962), 275 f. A voluntary removal from the capital was not unprecedented although it was rare. In the middle of the fifth century, Empress Athenais-Eudokia decided to spend her remaining years in Jerusalem after her marriage had failed.

462 *Pachymeres* IV, 415 (XI,5).

463 *MM* V, 268–270. Constantinidi-Bibikou, operating from an incorrect dating of the empress's departure (1304), places the donation at 1305, thinking that it was made at a time when the couple's relationship was not yet too strained (Constantinidi-Bibikou (1950), 434 f). She also questions the possibility that this same document established Eirene as governor over the Serres region (Constantinidi-Bibikou (1950), 441).

Metochites, to defend the city[464] (and, perhaps, to watch over his wife).[465] Eirene apparently took all three of her sons with her even though the sources mention only the presence of the eldest in her suite.[466] As Theodore later witnessed his mother's meeting with the Montferrat legates who came to inform Eirene of her brother's death (see below), it is probable that both he and Demetrios took up permanent residence in Thessalonike in 1303. As for John, he did not remain long at the court of his mother but returned to Constantinople where he became eparch of the city.[467]

Soon after Eirene's arrival, the army of the duke of Athens, supported by the Greek barons of Thessaly, besieged Thessalonike. Even under these pressing circumstances, Eirene remained calm. She sent legates to the duke and his allies to appeal to their honor as knights and remind them of their recent armistice with her husband. Whatever else she may have written, her letter clearly impressed them, and they withdrew from 'her' dominion.[468] Nikephoros Gregoras, far removed from Thessalonike, offers a much less flattering image of the empress's behavior upon her arrival in Thessaly. He claims (without mentioning his sources or establishing their reliability) that she immediately proceeded to cause further scandal by revealing the details of her intimate life with the emperor to her courtiers and foreign legates.[469]

The vacated throne of Montferrat

Settled in Thessalonike, Eirene began planning the marriage of her second son, Theodore. She wanted him to wed Agnes, the niece of the young duke of Athens.[470] Though Agnes was not an heiress to the duchy, the empress believed that with the military aid of Athens she could conquer Thessaly (at that time ruled by John II)[471] and establish there an independent principality for her son.[472] However, the duke rejected this plan, and Andronikos II decided to stabilize relations between the empire and Thessaly by giving his illegitimate daughter, Eirene, to John II in marriage in 1315.[473]

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464 Theodore Metochites was present in the city in the years 1303–1305. See Laiou (1972), 214, 219. Ševčenko (1962), 275–278. Ševčenko (1975), 27 f.

465 See also, *Van Dieten*, 289, n. 407. For further details on Metochites, see Laiou (1972), 230, fn. 124. See also Malamut (2003), 266 f.

466 Nicol (1972B), 160.

467 *Pachymeres* IV, 527 (XII,2), 545 (XII,11).

468 *Livre de la Conqueste*, 359–362, arts. 912–918.

469 *Gregoras* I, 235 f. (VII,5).

470 *Gregoras* I, 237 (VII,5).

471 For details and further literature, see *Van Dieten* I, 289, ns. 408–409. See Laiou's discussion of the possible date of this marriage (Laiou (1972) 230, fn. 127).

472 *Gregoras* I, 237 (VII,5). *Palaiologos*, 32.

473 *Gregoras* I, 249 (VII,7).

Soon afterwards, another "opportunity" to advance the position of one of Eirene's sons presented itself. In January 1305, John I of Montferrat (the empress's brother), died childless, and an embassy from the West arrived in Thessalonike to apprise Eirene of the news and request that she or one of her sons ascend to the vacated throne. Theodore Palaiologos described this audience in his work titled *Les Enseignements ou ordenances pour un seigneur qui a guerres et grans gouvernements a faire,*[474] preserved in an Old French translation of Jean de Vignay. In a fairly stylized narrative, Theodore informs his readers that the empress received the news of her brother's death with equanimity. Pious woman that she was, she decided to follow the Scriptural command that wives should obey their husbands in everything and sought the advice of her husband in the matter.[475] Though she initially favored her firstborn for the position, it was her second son, Theodore, who eventually sailed to Lombardy in January 1306[476] where he married Argentina Spinola, the daughter of an important Genoese nobleman.[477]

The patriarchal initiative

Unfortunately, Theodore does not mention whether the empress requested her husband's opinion by letter or in person. In Thessalonike, she was far removed from the sight of the Constantinopolitan historiographers, who seldom mention her after 1303.[478] Therefore, the main source on this little-known period of Eirene's life comprises the correspondence of Patriarch Athanasios I, who resumed the patriarchal office in June 1303 after the more or less voluntary resignation of John XII Glykys.[479] Athanasios's letters offer unique insight into the dynamics of the imperial family, indicating the prominent role of the patriarch not only as the

474 The text, significantly revised by the translator, was edited by Christine Knowles.

475 *Palaiologos*, 32.

476 *Gregoras* I, 237–241. (VII,5). *Pachymeres* IV, 659 (XIII,18). Theodore settled in the West and married Argentina Spinola. In her study, Dr. Dabrowska claims that the marriage of Theodore and Argentina was supported by Andronikos II, who needed Genoese assistance against the Grand Catalan Company. For details, see Dabrowska (1996), 115.

477 Gregoras claims that it was Eirene who sent her son to Lombardy to marry Argentina Spinola (*Gregoras* I, 237 (VII,5)). Considering the marriages Eirene had planned for her sons, it is unlikely that she would have selected such a modest union. It is more probable that Theodore needed allies in the West who could offer practical support and that he found them in Argentina's family.

478 This problem is partly due to the fact that Pachymeres ends his account in 1307 while Kantakouzenos begins his in 1320. This makes Gregoras the only source on the period between 1307 and 1320, and he covers it in a very selective manner.

479 Edited by Alice-Mary Talbot, Athanasios's letters from the interregnum (1293–1303) and from his second patriarchate (1303–1309) were mainly preserved in *Vaticanus gr.* 2219. For Athanasios's return to the patriarchal throne, see *Gregoras* I, 215 ff. (VII,1).

confidant of Prince John but also as an advisor and spiritual father to the entire household. Later copyists divided the correspondence by addressee and thus further obscured the chronology of the (rarely dated) missives. I suggest that the patriarch wrote *Letters 56*, *75*, *84*, *86*, *97* and *98*, related to the empress, in the following order and under the following circumstances:

In *Letter 98*, the patriarch requests an interview with Andronikos to discuss the separation of the imperial couple and facilitate their reconciliation. The sense of urgency permeating this missive indicates that it was written at a time when the official separation of the imperial couple was still fresh. As Athanasios returned to the patriarchal office several months after Eirene had left Constantinople, it is reasonable to assume that he wrote *Letter 98* soon after his re-inauguration and not years later, when the probability of the couple's reconciliation had diminished. It is not very likely that the letter was written during the patriarchate of John XII. For one thing, the marital problems of the ruling couple only became public knowledge after the empress's departure from Constantinople. For another, while it was the patriarch's duty to promote unity within the imperial family, a mere monk could hardly advise the emperor on such matters. Following his abdication, which had been preceded by strong opposition within the city, Athanasios had had to leave his residence at night and under the protection of guards. He had then lived in the Xerolophos Monastery, some distance from the Blacherns residence of the emperor. Because of his many enemies among the clergy, he certainly would not have had easy access to the meeting places mentioned in his missive (the Palace of Blacherns, the Chora Monastery, or the Church of All Saints).

In *Letter 97*, written during Lent, the patriarch again urges the emperor to reconcile himself to his wife. This time he stresses the word "sin," mentions the "whispered reproaches of certain people," and recommends continence. While the style is somewhat cryptic, the patriarch is evidently hinting at the presence of a mistress. (Whether the affair began before or after Eirene's departure isn't clear.) Though the sources do not preserve the identity of the woman, she may have given birth to at least one daughter.[480] The letter was probably written in 1304 or 1305 before the empress visited the capital. After her visit, reconciliation had become extremely unlikely.

Letter 75 is addressed directly to the empress and proves that she visited Constantinople at least once during her years in Thessalonike. The missive conveys Athanasios's empathy with her difficult situation even as it mourns her separation from her husband. It also bewails the "temptation" and "jealousy" that prevail over the "wonder of natural love" and expresses sadness over the fact that the empress was not able to "make her love surmount every distressing incident."[481]

480 *Athanasios,* 124, (trans.) *ibid.*, *Letter 97*, 252, (trans.) 253. For further details, see *ibid.*, 427.

481 *Athanasios*, 124, (trans.) *ibid.*, *Letter 75*, *186*, *188* (trans. 187, 189). For further details, see *ibid.*, 397 f.

The patriarch also regrets that Eirene received "those people who attempt to exacerbate an unpleasant situation" and, in the second half of the letter, calls on the empress to overcome her grief and focus instead on good deeds, which will help her to forgive and resolve the conflict with Andronikos. This letter also reveals that the patriarch had begun his fairly frequent correspondence with the empress while she was still in Thessalonike. ("And first of all, I applied persuasion by veiled hints, as seemed right to me, and when by the mercy of God it happened that you returned, I began to apply open and constant pressure (. . .)").[482]

The interpretation of the missive is once again enigmatic. The empress apparently journeyed to the capital as the patriarch had requested in his lost letters. She may have intended to consult Andronikos regarding the vacated throne of Montferrat and/or speak to John, whom she initially favored for the position and who was living in the city at the time. The word "temptation" may refer to the emperor, who had taken a lover and fathered illegitimate offspring in the interim,[483] while 'jealousy' could describe the empress's reaction on learning of her husband's infidelity, revealed to her by the unknown 'certain persons.' Apparently, she took the news very hard, which would agree with the information, provided by the patriarch's letter, that she did not become reconciled with Andronikos.

In respect to the date of the empress's visit, if Eirene was seeking her husband's advice regarding the new ruler of Montferrat, she must have come to Constantinople in 1305.[484] Her brother died in January of that year, and the matter was settled before the following January when Theodore sailed to Lombardy. While it is still possible that the visit described in her letter took place at another time, her lack of understanding and unreadiness to forgive suggest that Eirene did not undertake the journey primarily to make peace. As for the number of times the empress visited the capital, she could, of course, have returned several times; however, considering the distance, the dangers on the road (posed, for example, by

482 *Ibid.*

483 Andronikos's illegitimate daughter Eirene married John II of Thessaly in 1315. If she had married at the canonical age of twelve, she would have been born in 1303. Her birth and her baptismal name may have exasperated Empress Eirene and strengthened her resolution to leave for Thessalonike. In 1304, Pachymeres mentions that an illegitimate daughter was offered to Khan Gazan of Tabriz and, after him, to his brother Olgäitü (*Pachymeres* IV, 441 (XI,16)). Failler suggested that this bride could have been Eirene (*Pachymeres* IV, 440, fn. 22), who would still have been a young child at that time. Andronikos's other known illegitimate daughter, Maria, married Toqtai, Khan of the Golden Horde, in 1292. As Laiou pointed out (Laiou (1972), 176, fn. 66), the princess was not widowed until 1313; therefore, the negotiations could not have concerned her.

484 The likelihood that Eirene returned to Constantinople briefly in 1305 is further supported by the fact that Theodore Metochites also returned to the capital that year after a nearly two-year absence. For argumentation, see Malamut (2003), 269.

the Catalan Company), and the silence of the sources, it is unlikely that she made the trip very often.

The other letter that can be dated to the empress's visit to Constantinople, *Letter 56*, contains a message from the patriarch to the emperor, inviting him to participate in the celebration of the Dormition of the Virgin (August 15) in Hagia Sophia "together with the most pious Augusta if possible."[485] The letter had to have been written after Athanasios's return to office because he would not have been able to perform the festivity in the main church of the city otherwise. As he returned to the patriarchal throne after the empress had left Constantinople and as he requested her presence, Eirene must have been visiting the capital at the time.[486]

The beginning of the letter, which mentions the queen of Sheba coming to see Solomon in order to learn from him, could be an allusion to the empress's visit and to her journey from Thessalonike. Unless the missive was written during another of the empress's stays in the capital, it may be dated to August 1305. As for Eirene's response to the invitation, she probably refused to attend. If she had been present at a ceremony as important and well attended as the Dormition of the Virgin, it is unlikely that no source would have remarked on it, especially after a sustained absence from the capital.

Letter 84 may likewise be dated with some degree of accuracy. As it concerns the choice of the future marquis of Montferrat, it must have been written between January 1305 and January 1306, probably not too close to the later date.[487] In this letter, the patriarch complains that the emperor has not asked his opinion on sending Prince John to Italy. Athanasios apparently heard the news from John, who was a favorite of his. Evidently, the prince did not wish to leave Byzantium. His reasons may have included his satisfaction with his duties as eparch of Constantinople (from 1304), his unwillingness (or that of his young wife, Eirene Palaiologina Choumnaina) to leave his family and his country, or his fear, evidently shared by the patriarch, that the Lombard nobility would require John to become a Catholic. Perhaps John also realized that his being married would be a disadvantage in Italy[488] since he would be unable to acquire powerful relatives among the local nobility through an advantageous match.

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485 *Athanasios*, 124, (trans.) *ibid.*, *Letter 56*, 124. For further details, see *ibid.*, 366.

486 Admittedly, Eirene was not the only *augousta* at the Byzantine court at this time. Her stepdaughter-in-law, Maria of Armenia, also received this title when she was crowned by her husband, Michael IX, in 1294. Nevertheless, it would have been odd for the patriarch to call on Andronikos to appear at the ceremony with his daughter-in-law, to whom he does not seem to have been especially close.

487 Angeliki Laiou dates it to late May or June 1305, which would mean either that Eirene arrived in Constantinople in the spring or that she informed the emperor about her preference for John as the future marquis of Monferrat by letter (Laiou (1968), 403).

488 *Athanasios*, 411. *Historia Montis Ferrati*, 453 B–C.

The patriarch implores the emperor not to send his son to Montferrat, refuting the various reasons Andronikos might have for sending him. In the second part of the letter, Athanasios also expresses his concern for the mother of the prince:

> But for the time being I think it better for both that he [John] not come into the presence of his beloved mother, the Despoina. For if he does not heed her as a mother or respect her as the Despoina, he will cause her even greater grief. And if out of meanness of spirit she should speak harshly, with innuendoes, or should curse him, it would not profit either of them. And if it should occur that he replied rather shamelessly, so much the worse.[489]

This passage, written by someone who knew Eirene personally, depicts her as a strong-willed woman with a tendency toward verbal abuse and proves that her relationship with her eldest son, for whose career she was willing to risk so much, was far from ideal. The excerpt also implies that Eirene was in Constantinople when the letter was written, for the prince's visiting his mother is not described in terms of a journey.

The emperor took the patriarch's advice and initially recommended his youngest son, Demetrios, for the post. Later, the imperial couple arrived at a compromise, and their middle son, Theodore, sailed for Lombardy.[490] The fears of the patriarch proved well founded as Theodore soon converted to Catholicism and adopted Western fashions and a Western lifestyle.[491]

Letter 86 reveals an important fact: it was Eirene who distributed money to her sons (probably from the means allocated to her by Andronikos) and thus controlled their income. For some reason, possibly in response to John's refusal to go to Montferrat, she decided to withdraw the prince's allowance. This put him in the

489 *Athanasios*, 124, (trans.) *ibid.*, *Letter 84*, 224, (trans.) 225. For further details, see *ibid.*, 410–414.

490 *Palaiologos*, 26–32. Eirene's choice of Theodore as the heir to Montferrat is also mentioned by Kantakouzenos. The historian adds that Theodore had a daughter and returned to Constantinople in later years to request money. *Kantakouzenos* I, 256 (I,51). See also *Gregoras* I, 237 (VII,5).

491 *Pachymeres* IV, 659 (XIII,18). Regarding Theodore's marriage, see *Gregoras* I, 237–240 (VII,5). Theodore travelled West in 1306 and married Argentina Spinola the same year. They had two children, Yolanda and John. Theodore returned to Constantinople at least twice, once in connection with his journey to Serbia and once to request money between 1316 and 1318 (see Cognasso (1927). On the latter occasion, he may not have come to beg but merely to collect his share of the inheritance, which Andronikos divided between him and his remaining brother, Demetrios. This visit would have followed the death of his mother in 1317, which would fit the chronology suggested by the sources. Having fallen out with his father, he sided with his nephew (Andronikos III) in the civil war (1326–1327) and wrote the aforementioned work, *Les Enseignements ou ordenances pour un seigneur qui a guerres et grans gouvernements a faire*. Theodore died in 1338.

awkward position of having to fall back on the dowry of his wealthy wife, but she was hardly eager to finance their household (as another missive from the patriarch indicates).[492] A distressed John requested assistance from the patriarch, who turned to Andronikos for advice on how best to compose the petition to Eirene so as not to aggravate the conflict.[493] Athanasios then wrote to the empress in an attempt to facilitate reconciliation between her and her son. At some later point in time, the patriarch addressed the emperor (*Letter 85*), requesting permission for the prince to visit his mother and be reconciled with her. Through Athanasios, John "entreats" his father "to send him there [to his mother] as soon as possible." The letter conveys a sense of urgency. While the commentary to the edition places this letter to 1305,[494] it may have been written in 1306–1307 before the prince and his wife visited Thessalonike. Andronikos, apparently unwilling to become involved in the financial problems of his son, allowed John to leave. Unless John was terminally ill at the time of his departure (which would furnish an alternative explanation for his urgent desire to see his mother and seek reconciliation), Andronikos may have lived to regret his decision. There was no joy in the reunion of mother and son, which took place at the end of 1306 or at the beginning of the following year, for John died suddenly in Thessalonike where he was also laid to rest.[495] In his monody on John, the prolific poet Manuel Philes placed a dramatic speech of mourning into Eirene's mouth:

> How then will I not tear my hair over you?
> How not scratch my cheeks with my nails?
> For it is necessary that I mix my streams of tears
> With the red-dyed mishap of shreds;
> I would have loved if I had a child
> Either copper or iron or wood by nature. . .
> (. . .)
> Alas, alas, confounded by death and toils
> I am faint-hearted and cannot speak [any more].[496]

How well these moving words reflected the true feelings of the empress is difficult to say. History does not portray her as a tenderhearted woman, yet under all

492 *Athanasios*, 228, for commentary, see 414 f.
493 *Athanasios*, 124, (trans.) *ibid.*, *Letter 86*, 228, (trans.) 229. For further details, see *ibid.*, 414 f.
494 *Athanasios* 124, (trans.) *ibid.*, *Letter 84*, 414.
495 On John's death, see *Gregoras* I, 241 (VII,5). For the dating of John's death, see Failler (1999), 233.
496 *Manuelis Philae Carmina*, 399, 402. (Trans.) Gaul (2017), 191. For the full poem, written as a series of speeches, see *Manuelis Philae Carmina*, 388–414, n. 213. Unfortunately, it is not clear who commissioned Philes's monody nor whether it was performed in Thessalonike or in Constantinople during the funeral rites or memorial services for the deceased prince.

her arrogance, she did love her children – no matter how difficult it was for her to show her feelings in an appropriate manner at times. John left no heir. His young widow returned to the capital where she became a nun and, eventually, abbess of the convent of Christ Philanthropos.[497]

Demetrios, Theodore, and the affair of the Serbian throne

Eirene's efforts to provide for her sons remained her primary focus throughout the first decade of the fourteenth century. Having lost hope for grandchildren through Simonis, the empress continued her generosity towards the Serbian king,[498] thinking he might designate one of her sons as his heir.[499] In 1304, Eirene entrusted her son Demetrios with great riches and sent him to Serbia. Though the king received him warmly, the young prince found the land inhospitable and the nobility unwilling to accept him. He soon returned to the court of his mother in Thessalonike.[500]

Still unwilling to abandon the idea, the empress recalled Theodore from Montferrat and sent him to the Serbian court.[501] His beardless chin[502] and Latin manners did little to endear him to either the local nobility or his Orthodox subjects, and although the old king's manner was kindly enough, the marquis found it impossible to assert his position in the Serbian court. Like his brother Demetrios, he found no reason to linger there. Gregoras claims that Theodore arrived in Byzantium in time to see his mother alive. He then took his leave from her and sailed back to Lombardy.[503]

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497 For further information, sources, and a full biography of Eirene Palaiologina Choumnaina, see Hero (1985).

498 *Gregoras* I, 241 f. (VII,5). See also Malamut (2003), 274.

499 *Gregoras* I, 243 f. (VII,5).

500 The successive sojourns of the two brothers in Serbia are cryptically mentioned in the monody of Theodore Hyrtakenos (*Hyrtakenos*, 273). Demetrios then spent some time in Thessalonike, married, and had at least two children (for details, see Nicol (1972B), 159). Later, he left for Constantinople where he devoted his time to painting and writing. In 1327–28, he became caught up in the conflict between his father and his nephew, joining the former. At this time, he was also named governor of Thessalonike. In 1328, Andronikos III imprisoned the family of his half uncle while Demetrios fled to Serbia. Later, he returned to Constantinople where he was accused of *lèse-majesté* (1336–7), but the charges were dropped after the intervention of his sister Simonis.

501 *Gregoras* I, 243 (VII,5).

502 For further details, see *Van Dieten* I, 291, n. 20.

503 *Gregoras* I, 243 f. (VII,5). Considering the fact that the events following the account fall into the first decade of the fourteenth century, it is probable that Theodore was in Serbia around this time, following his brother's visit to the Serbian court. Van Dieten places the date of Theodore's visit a decade later and expresses doubts as to whether Theodore, who is known to have gone to Constantinople, actually did

Protectress of Thessalonike or dangerous traitor?

Eirene was not neglectful of the city she considered her domain. She assumed its administration and, as Theodore Metochites testifies, published a number of imperial documents and orders.[504] When Thessalonike was repeatedly endangered by foreign invasions, including threats from the Catalan Company, she took energetic steps for its protection, making use of military units she had acquired from her son-in-law (1305–1306). Furthermore, she endeavored to repopulate the city by bringing in Greek settlers from Belgrade and the Serbian territories.[505]

The image of the empress as a public benefactor of Thessalonike dimmed when modern historians accused her of supporting Charles of Valois, the brother of Philip IV of France. Charles, by his marriage to Catherine of Courtenay in 1300, had "acquired" the rights to the throne of the former Latin Empire, which had been destroyed by Michael VIII Palaiologos in 1261. In March 1308, Charles and Stephan Uroš II Milutin (who was both the ruler of Serbia and Eirene's son-in-law), united against Byzantium when they signed the Treaty of Lys. According to Helène Constantinidi-Bibikou, the empress allegedly supported the French prince in his bid to reconquer the Byzantine Empire.[506] The historian based her claim on a document,[507] kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, which preserves the names of Valois's cohorts,[508] including (among others) John Monomach, the governor of Thessalonike, and Opicino Spinola, the father-in-law of Theodore of Montferrat. Additionally, Constantinidi-Bibikou mentions a letter, written by Constantine Doukas Limpidaris and addressed to Charles of Valois,[509] which states that Charles had many allies in Byzantium, first among them his "powerful and holy lady and empress."[510] While Mavromatis claims in his study on the origins of the Serbian state that this empress is the titular empress of Constantinople, Catherine of Courtenay,[511] in the opinion of Constantinidi-Bibikou, "a Latin domination in the

reach Serbia in 1216 (*Van Dieten* I, 291, n. 421). Laiou and Bosch, on the other hand, accept the historian's account. For details, see Laiou (1972), 231), Bosch (1965), 85.

504 Ševčenko (1962), 275, ls. 734 f.

505 *Pachymeres* IV, 609 (XII,34). See also Laiou (1972), 224.

506 Constantinidi-Bibikou (1950), 438 f. Nicol (see Nicol (1996), 55) does not share this view, stating that there is "little evidence" for Eirene's involvement.

507 Bibliothèque Natinale, *Baluze Collection*, no. 394, parchment roll, part 696. (Unfortunately, I did not have access to this document).

508 For further details, see Moranvillé (1890).

509 Archive National, J. 510, No. 254. See also Moranvillé (1890), 21 f. Constantinidi-Bibikou (1950), 439.

510 "Πρώτω μεν δια ὀνομαν τῆς κραταίας καὶ ἁγίας μου κῦριας" (I leave the diacritics and spelling as published in the Constantinidi-Bibikou article.) See Constantinidi-Bibikou (1950), 439.

511 Mavromatis (1978), 65.

East fitted well her [Eirene's] western spirit and could contribute to the materialization of her own ambition."[512]

Despite the evidence provided, the French scholar's argument is not entirely convincing. Would Eirene really have believed that Charles of Valois would give up sizeable parts of his newly acquired empire to her sons? While the empress may have been blinded by her quick temper on occasion, she must have known that French success in this endeavor could only reduce her to a guest in her own home. The only explanations for her alleged involvement in the plot would be either that she learned of the plans and decided to feign support in order to keep a back door open (in case Charles succeeded) or that she considered invasion unlikely but had decided to give an appearance of support for political reasons, to maintain a connection with the organizers of the plot, and to back Stephan Uroš II Milutin, who was involved in the affair to some extent.[513]

The failed return to Constantinople

In an effort to stem the progress of the Turks, Andronikos put the protection of his eastern borders in the hands of Western mercenaries, the most important being the Catalan Company[514] led by Roger de Flor. After minor victories in 1302, these same mercenaries, underpaid and unwilling to risk serious losses in a conquest of Asia Minor, turned back to wreak havoc on Byzantium. The Byzantines attempted to divide the contingent by organizing the murder of their captain, but Roger's death only served to provoke the Catalan soldiers, who expanded their raids into Greece, ultimately seizing the French Duchy of Athens and Thebes, which they held until 1388.[515]

In the spring of 1308, Eirene once again traveled to Constantinople; however, her reasons for doing so remain unknown. Angeliki Laiou suggests that she was bringing Serbian aid against the Catalan Company,[516] but it is equally possible that she was seeking safety or that she wished to mourn the death of her son John together with Andronikos.[517] Near the end of her journey, she received word from

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512 « (...) une predominance des Latins en Orient était conforme à son esprit d'Occidentale et pouvait contribuer à la réalisation de ses ambitions. » Constantinidi-Bibikou (1950), 439. On the Valois intrigue, see Malamut (2003), 270 ff. Dr. Malamut claims that « il serait invraisemblable qu'Irène de Montferrat ait été à l'écart de ces intrigues et qu'elle n'en ait eu aucune connaissance. »

513 In her study on Andronikos, Laiou concludes that "no one has proved that the reference is, in fact, to Irene, or that she was in any way involved." Laiou (1972), 213. As I did not find any persuasive evidence for Eirene's participation, I agree with Dr. Laiou's conclusion. See also Mavromatis (1978), 63–65.

514 For details and further literature on the (Grand) Catalan Company, see *ODB* I, 389.

515 Laiou (1972), 127–157.

516 Laiou (1972), 173. See also *Pachymeres* IV, 609 (XII,34).

517 This view is suggested by Nicol (Nicol (1996), 55).

the emperor that the Turks and the Catalans had occupied the outer wall of the Byzantine capital and were inflicting considerable damage on the land and the people alike. There was no way to enter the city, and Eirene was forced to return to Thessalonike.[518]

In the fall of the same year, Eirene again found herself in grave danger. The Catalans decided to plunder Thessalonike, "the rich residence of two empresses, Eirene and Maria,"[519] hoping to make it the base from which to begin a gradual conquest of Macedonia. The emperor, however, had anticipated this move and successfully shielded the city from their attack. In 1309 the Catalans were forced to withdraw, and Charles of Valois abandoned his pretensions soon afterwards.[520]

Supporter of monasteries

As ruler of Thessalonike and the surrounding territories,[521] Eirene operated a chancery of her own, which was (at times) led by excellent chancellors: George Metochites, the *mesazon* and close associate of Andronikos II, held the office in 1304–1305 and another important politician serving the same emperor, Nikephoros Choumnos, took over in 1308. The preserved sources testify that Eirene published a number of documents, which Metochites classified in his poetry as imperial orders (θέσπια βασιλικά).[522] These documents were corroborated by a seal that Eirene had begun using sometime after her coronation. On the obverse, it bears an image of the Virgin holding the Child and seated on a throne. Both are depicted with a halo. The reverse captures the empress, this time standing, wearing a high crown with pendants (*prependoulia*) and a wide-sleeved robe (*divitision*). Her long, decorated scarf (*loros*) is adorned with "two vertical rows of pellets enclosed in squares."[523] The empress carries the scepter (*baion*) in her right hand while her left is raised in a gesture of supplication. The inscription in two columns describes her as 'Εἰρήνη εὐσεβεστάτη αὐγούστα Κομνηνή Δούκ(αι)να ἡ Παλαιολογίνα.'[524]

The four texts known to have been authorized by the empress concern monastic institutions. Nevertheless, even though not all of Eirene's patronage has been

518 *Pachymeres* IV, 645 (XIII,12). Laiou (1972), 171.
519 *Gregoras* I, 245 (VII,6). For Maria, the wife of Michael IX, apparently lived in Thessalonike whenever her husband conducted military operations in Thrace. For further details, see *PLP*, n. 21394 and the relevant biographical chapter of this study. The two empresses most probably did not live together; each would have had her own palace. For further information, see Tantsis (2014), 79.
520 For details, see Malamut (2003), 272.
521 *MM* V, 268 ff. The document cannot be dated with precision nor does it name the properties conferred upon Eirene.
522 Ševčenko (1964), 275–278. Barišić (1971), 159.
523 Zacos–Veglery (1972), I/I, n. 125, 121 f.
524 For further description, see Touratsoglou (1973), 272, image: *ibid.*, 285, 287.

accounted for, in light of the fact that she was one of the wealthiest empresses of the Palaiologan era,[525] her (known) generosity toward these religious institutions was by no means extraordinary. The first of her imperial orders concerns the monk Kosmas Pankalos, who made a substantial donation to the Pantokrator Monastery in Constantinople in February 1313 in return for three living allowances (*adelphata*).[526] Later, the monastery was reluctant to fulfill its part of the obligation, and Pankalos appealed to Eirene, who ordered the monastery to honor the agreement by means of an imperial order (*prostagma*) signed by her servants.[527] According to Barišić, who studied the documents of the late Byzantine empresses in detail, Eirene must have been one of the patrons of the Pantokrator, the main burial site of the Palaiologan imperial family, where she herself was later interred. The fact that Pankalos addressed his complaint to Eirene rather than to her husband, whom Pankalos served as *pronoiarios*, further supports this claim.[528]

In February 1322, Andronikos II confirmed Eirene's donation of three fishing grounds[529] to the Monastery of Alipiou on the Holy Mountain and also a gift to Chilandar Monastery, which she apparently made shortly before her death. According to a document published by Despot Demetrios in November 1317, his mother had ordered him to donate land on the Strymon River to Chilandar so that the monks there could build a mill, a project Eirene did not live to see completed.[530] While the empress's reasons for selecting Chilandar and Alipiou remain unknown, in the case of Chilandar, the fact that her daughter Simonis became the founder (*ktitorissa* of this Serbian foundation) may have inspired the empress's generosity.

A fourth document, found in the *Actes de Zographou*,[531] indicates Eirene's possible interest in this monastic institution. The empress, whom Paul Lemerle identified with Eirene but whom the text describes merely as the "Despoina,"[532] was apparently called on to mediate a quarrel between the monasteries of Karakala and Zographou regarding the village of Lontziane (Thessaly). The monks of Karakala argued that it had once belonged to them but that they had lost the documents proving their claim during the Latin rule of Thessalonike. Based on this argument, the empress ordered another inquiry.

Regarding the donation of physical objects, Eirene may have been the Eirene Palaiologissa[533] who donated a Gospel to the Great Lavra Monastery on Athos[534] as

525 Barišić (1971), 197.
526 A monastery fellowship, which entitled the holder to food and support for life. For details, see *ODB* I, 19.
527 *Actes de Kutlumus*, n. 8, 50–53, line 7.
528 Barišić (1971), 159–165, see especially 160 f.
529 *Actes de Kutlumus*, n. 11, 60–64, lines 25–26. Barišić (1971), 161 f.
530 *Actes de Chilandar*, n. 76, 7. Barišić (1971), 162–165.
531 *Actes de Zographou*, n. 35.
532 Lemerle (1945), 189.
533 Politis (1958), 276.
534 For a detailed description, see Pelekanides *et al.* (1979), III, 234.

Belting,[535] Nelson, and Lowden[536] claimed. Politis believed the donor to be Eirene-Adelheid (of Braunschweig-Grubenhagen), the first wife of Andronikos III, based on the close contacts between Andronikos III and the Hodegon Monastery. There is one difficulty with the otherwise plausible connection proposed by Politis, however. The text describes the empress as "*augousta*," a title used in late Byzantium exclusively for crowned empresses, and Eirene-Adelheid was merely the wife of the eldest son of an emperor. Her husband was not crowned until after her death. Considering the fact that Eirene-Yolanda was a crowned *augousta* and spent fourteen years in Thessalonike close to the Holy Mountain, where she also supported two monasteries, she stands out as the more probable donor.

Finally, an enigmatic inscription on the Church of St. Demetrios in Prilep asks God to remember his servants, Andronikos and Eirene,[537] who are identified as the emperors of Byzantium. As Eirene owned numerous properties in Macedonia, she may have sponsored this institution in return for prayers on behalf of herself and her husband; if so, this would be a touching testimony to her love for a man with whom she could not live.

Death at Drama

After 1308, Eirene apparently made no further attempts to return to Constantinople and spent the remaining years of her life in Thessalonike without attracting the attention of the historiographers. In the fall of 1317, she decided to go to Drama, located in what is currently northeastern Greece, an area she had visited previously on several occasions. Shortly after her arrival, she fell ill and died,[538] still in her early forties. Upon receiving the news of her mother's death, Queen Simonis[539] came from Serbia and accompanied the body to Constantinople, where Eirene was

535 Belting (1971), 160, fn. 38, 172.

536 Nelson–Lowden (1991), 64: "For example, Empress Eirene, wife of Andronikos II, donates to the Lavra Monastery on Mount Athos a large lectionary, decorated with headpieces, initials, and evangelist portraits, that appears to have originated in Thessalonike." Whether she also sponsored the manuscripts and their illustration remains unclear. See also Nelson (1991B), 64–67. For further details on the lectionary, see Talbot (2011–2012), 272 f.

537 Babić (1969), 29: "[Μνήσθητι Κύρι]ε τοῦ δούλου τοῦ θ[ε]οῦ Ἀ[νδρ]ονίκου κ(αὶ) Ἠρή[νη]ς."

538 *Gregoras* I, 273 (VII,12).

539 Having buried her mother, Simonis was obliged to return to her husband in Serbia, where she remained until his death in 1321. On her subsequent return to Constantinople, she became involved in the Palamite controversy and, sometime before 1328, took her vows as the nun Eugenia, possibly in the Convent of St. Andrew in Krisei. She also took care of her father, Andronikos II, until his death in February 1332.

buried in the Pantokrator Monastery (October 1317).[540] As Barišić surmised, Eirene may have been a sponsor of this institution, which would explain why she was buried there and not in the family mausoleum at Lips. Having lived their separate lives, the imperial couple was not united even after their deaths as Andronikos later chose Lips as his burial place (where he rested with neither wife but close to his mother). Eirene, however, did not remain alone in the Pantokrator. In 1321, the body of Prince John was transferred there from Thessalonike and laid to rest close to his mother, possibly due to the efforts of Queen Simonis.[541] Soon after her burial in the capital, Eirene's name was inscribed into the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*[542] and remains part of the official commemorations to this day.

Eirene's last will and testament must have been something of a surprise to those who knew her, for despite their estrangement, it seems the empress made her husband the principal heir of her large, private fortune. Andronikos, however, returned her generous gesture. After he had used part of the money to repair the Church of Hagia Sophia,[543] he apparently divided the rest between her sons, Theodore and Demetrios. Four preserved works mourn Eirene's death. Alexios Lampenos,[544] the Thessalonian author of several monodies on members of the imperial family, noted her sponsoring of unspecified buildings[545] and her kindness and generosity towards the poor, prisoners, and monks (something of a *topos*).[546] The poem by Manuel Philes describes her family and mentions her children.[547] Finally, the poetic epitaph[548] by Theodore Metochites and the monody of Theodore

540 *Gregoras* I, 273 (VII,12), II, 287 (VIII,5). *Lampenos*, 380. Laiou (1972) 282. *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 76, n. 11b. On October 23, 1317, Patriarch John XII Glykys celebrated the ceremony. Brooks (2006), 234. Such transfers of the remains of emperors and empresses were not exceptional. In her study, Judith Herrin describes several similar relocations from the middle Byzantine period. For details, see Herrin (2002).

541 Though this theory is not corroborated by the sources, it is possible that the transfer took place at the request of Simonis, who was widowed that year and moved back to Constantinople. As the only daughter, she would have been called on to care for the memory of the members of the imperial family, and it would have been convenient for her to have them all close at hand.

542 *Gouillard, Synodikon*, 101.

543 *Gregoras* I, 168 (VI,2), 233 (VII,5), 273 (VII,12).

544 For details on Lampenos, see Sideras (1982), 274.

545 *Lampenos*, 378.

546 *Lampenos*, 379.

547 *Manuelis Philae Carmina inedita*, n. 7, 13–17.

548 See Ἐπιτάφιοι εἰς τὴν Αὐγοῦσταν Εἰρήνην τὴν σύζυγον τοῦ θειοτάτου βασιλέως Ἀνδρονίκου τοῦ Παλαιολόγου, *Paris.* gr. 1776, fols. 99v–108v. Unfortunately, I did not have access to this manuscript. For a more detailed account, see Guilland (1926), 281 ff. Also see Ševčenko (1975), 28.

Hyrtakenos[549] contain numerous classical and Biblical allusions but offer little that helps to reconstruct the historical image of the empress.

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From the perspective of the sources, Eirene was certainly one of the more controversial of the Palaiologan empresses. The antipathy of Nikephoros Gregoras is evident in his depiction of Eirene as a greedy and shameless woman, who wanted to impose Western customs on Byzantine society and who allegedly attempted to exploit her sexual relationship with the emperor to achieve her personal aims. On the other hand, her son Theodore described her as a holy and pious woman. Finally, in his brief biography Donald Nicol made the superficial claim that Eirene became "vain, sour, jealous and troublesome" in her adult years.[550]

From what can be reconstructed of her personality (based on the accounts in the sources), Eirene was not gifted with empathy and found it difficult to include her stepchildren into "her" family. She tended to dramatize situations and was unable to accept "no" for an answer. Sadly, her focus on power and control rather than relationships negatively impacted the lives of the people she loved most. In her unwavering desire to secure for her own offspring both power and position, which she considered their due, the empress failed to protect her daughter from an uneven and eventually abusive marriage. Following the same value system, she protested against the apparently happy marriage of her eldest and tried to force her younger sons to ascend to the Serbian throne (an ordeal for them, given the opposition of the Serbian nobility). Unable or unwilling to change, Eirene paid dearly for her pride, intrigues, and unforgiveness as they slowly destroyed her marriage, damaged her relationships with her children, and brought her fourteen years of voluntary exile.

Despite her weaknesses, Eirene was possessed of important strengths. She was a competent governor of Thessalonike from 1303 to 1317, which indicates a certain administrative talent. She maintained diplomatic relations with the neighboring countries and was proactive in her attempts to secure independent principalities for her sons. While the negative image penned by Gregoras dwells largely on her foreign origins, Eirene arrived in Byzantium at the tender age of eleven and thus probably belonged to those late Byzantine empresses whose integration could be considered successful. Her subsequent problems were due more to her strong temperament and value system than to her ancestry. Although the sources focus on Eirene's separation from the emperor, it seems to have become an amicable agreement over time as suggested by her final gesture of magnanimity towards her husband. Perhaps Eirene, in her final years, was able to forgive at last and die at peace.

549 *Hyrtakenos*, 269–281.
550 Nicol (1996), 49.

IV Maria-Rita of Armenia: An Empress Surrounded by Death

(1296–1320)

(...) He [God] summoned you from a distant land, (...) He bade you rule together with my mighty and holy emperor [and] maintained the principles of piety unshaken and unadulterated in your most honest and good heart and soul (...)[551]

Patriarch Athanasios I

Introduction

As the thirteenth century drew to a close, the Palaiologan emperors were still looking for a way to escape the long shadow cast by the defunct Latin Empire. It occurred to Andronikos II to attempt a match between his eldest son, Michael (IX), and Catherine of Courtenay, the nominal heiress of the former principality through her parents, Philip I of Courtenay and Beatrice of Naples.[552] The project eventually had to be abandoned because of the emperor's rejection of the Union of Lyons (1282), which alienated the pope, and because of the exaggerated conditions submitted by the French.[553] Catherine went on to marry Charles of Valois, the brother of the French king. In the meantime, other courts seized the opportunity to offer their own princesses as brides for the emperor's heir. Anna, the *basilissa* of Epiros suggested her daughter Thamar; however, the prospective spouses were within the prohibited degree of consanguinity, and the proposal had to be refused.[554] Andronikos received additional offers from both Cyprus[555] and Lesser Armenia.[556] He first sent an embassy to Cyprus in the summer of 1295,[557] but his legates, led

551 *Athanasios*, 70, (trans.) 71.
552 *Pachymeres* III, 171 (VIII,18). Gregoras claims that it was the Latins who took the initiative but that the negotiations were later broken off because of the impossible demands of the Latin party (*Gregoras* I, 193 (VI,8)). See also Dabrowska (1996), 24 f.
553 *Pachymeres* III, 171 (VIII,18), 227–231 (IX,5). *Dölger, Regesten* IV, 18, n. 2156a. In 1294, an Anjou embassy participated in the coronation of Michael IX.
554 Anna Palaiologina was the daughter of Eirene-Eulogia, the sister of Emperor Michael VIII. *Pachymeres* III, 225 f. (IX,4).
555 Gregoras mentions the Cypriot proposal only after the Armenian one (*Gregoras* I, 194 (VI,8)).
556 *Pachymeres* III, 229 (IX,5). *Gregoras* I, 193 (VI,8).
557 I include the dates suggested by Pia Schmid in Schmid (1958), 84.

by Patriarch Athanasios II of Alexandria, had the misfortune to be ambushed by pirates and barely escaped with their lives.[558]

By October of the same year, Andronikos had dispatched new ambassadors, John Glykys and Theodore Metochites, to the island kingdom. This time, the party reached its destination safely. Open to the idea of a union between Cyprus and Byzantium, the Cypriot king, Henry II of Lusignan (1285–1324), nevertheless insisted on papal approval. Uncertain of the outcome of negotiations with the Curia, the ambassadors eventually left Cyprus for Lesser Armenia, where the Armenian king, Hethoum II (1289–1301), welcomed them cordially.[559] Following brief negotiations, the parties agreed that the king's thirteen-year-old twin sisters, Rita[560] and Theophano,[561] would travel together to Byzantium, where one would marry the young heir to the throne and the other a nobleman of high standing.[562]

The family and childhood of the Armenian princess

The sources tell us little about the childhood of the future empress and her sister. King Lewon II (1269–1289) and his wife Keran had a large family of sixteen children, ten sons and six daughters.[563] Only three of the girls reached adulthood: in addition to the twins, Rita and Theophano[564] (*1278/9), there was an older sister named Isabella (*1276/7), the twin of Prince Smbat. She married Amalric of Lusignan, Prince of Tyre, in 1293. As twins, Rita and Theophano were probably very close, which may explain why their brother wished for them to remain together as long as possible.

The princesses had grown up in a country that was frequently at war with the Mamluks. They lost their father when they were about eleven (1289), and the years that followed were marked by instability and unrest within the royal family. Their brother Hethoum II ascended the throne in 1289 but abdicated four years later in favor of another brother, Thoros (Theodore) III. The problematic reign of the

558 *Pachymeres* III, 231 (IX,5).
559 On the negotiations with the Armenian court, see Dabrowska (1996), 26 f.
560 *PLP*, n. 21394. For general information on Maria-Rita, see Papadopoulos (1938), 36 f. (Claiming that Maria died in prison and was buried in the family mausoleum of Kyra Martha, Papadopoulos confuses the empress with her chief political opponent, Theodora Kantakouzene, the mother of John VI Kantakouzenos.)
561 Gregoras only mentions one princess coming to Byzantium and calls her by her Byzantine name, Maria. *Gregoras* I, 193 (Armenian legates come to Constantinople), 195 (Byzantine legates go to Armenia, complete negotiations, and accompany bride to Byzantium) (both VI,8).
562 *Pachymeres* III, 231 (IX,5). For the circumstances of the marriage negotiations, see also Dabrowska (1996), 26 f. Iorga (1930), 43 f.
563 For details on Armenian history in this period, see Toumanoff (1966), 593–638.
564 For details, see *PLP*, n. 7624.

latter brought Hethoum back to the throne in 1294, just prior to the arrival of the Byzantine ambassadors.

An emergency conversion and marriage

While en route to Constantinople, the entire party was forced to land on Rhodes after Rita became gravely ill.[565] As her condition worsened, she abjured the teachings of the Armenian Church, which the Byzantines perceived as monophysite and therefore heretic,[566] and converted to Orthodoxy. The princess then received an anointing, a blessing, and the name Maria,[567] evidently from the Byzantine priests who were part of the embassy. According to the account, the future empress was not re-baptized.[568] The omission of this important ritual is explained by Byzantine theological texts, which imply that an Orthodox baptism was not required of Armenian converts. They were, however, obliged to make a formal proclamation accepting Orthodoxy and relinquishing Armenian teachings and diverse "heresies" condemned by the Orthodox Church before receiving the anointing.[569]

Describing Rita's reception of Orthodoxy in his historical work, Nikephoros Gregoras likened her to a 'shining rose' transplanted 'from the middle of sharp thorns' and to 'pure gold' gathered from 'false metal' [heretical Armenia].[570] After the conversion ritual, the princess made an unexpected recovery, and the sisters could continue their journey to the imperial city. Their ship landed close to the Kosmidion Monastery, where the senior and junior emperors, the court officials, and the inhabitants of Constantinople came out to welcome them in the manner customary for the arrival of an imperial bride.[571]

Whether it was the young emperor or his parents who did the choosing is not known, but it was Maria (Rita) who was betrothed to Michael IX, and a splendid wedding ceremony took place in Hagia Sophia on January 16, 1295.[572] As her

565 *Pachymeres* III, 231 f. (IX,5).

566 *Athanasios*, 342. The two churches did not recognize each other since the Armenian Church was united with Rome at this time (1198–1375) even though in practice it maintained its own teachings and rituals.

567 *Pachymeres* III, 231 f. (IX,5). For details on the ceremony, see *PG* 1, cols. 864–872 or *PG* 132, cols. 1257–1266. *Goar, Euchologion*, 876–892.

568 Scholars' opinions regarding Maria's second baptism vary. Albert Failler claims that the ritual was not necessary (*Pachymeres* III, 232, fn. 41; *Pachymeres* IV, 568, fn. 78) while Van Dieten upheld it (*Van Dieten*, II/1, 162, n. 119).

569 *PG* 1, cols. 864–872. *PG* 132, cols. 1257–1266.

570 *Gregoras* I, 493 (X,6).

571 *Pachymeres* III, 233 (IX,5). For details on arrival rituals, see the first chapter ('The Transformation: Becoming an Empress in Late Byzantium') in the second part of this book.

572 *Pachymeres* III, 233 (IX,6). For details, see *Van Dieten* I, 275 f., n. 338.

husband had been crowned eight months earlier (May 21, 1294),[573] Maria's coronation presumably took place immediately following her wedding.[574] Her sister, who received the name Theodora after the mother of Andronikos II and the first Palaiologan empress,[575] was engaged to *sebastokrator* Theodore Angelos of Epiros;[576] however, she did not survive the voyage west to join her husband (which took place in the following year) and was buried in Thessalonike.[577]

Between Byzantium and Lesser Armenia

Following her wedding, Maria must have been fully occupied with caring for her growing family. During the next several years, she gave birth to four children: Anna (*October 1295), Theodora (*June/July 1296), Andronikos (*March 25, 1297),[578] and Manuel (*after 1297).[579] She also managed to fulfill her representative duties; in 1299, for example, she accompanied her husband to the wedding of her half sister-in-law, Simonis Palaiologina, in Thessalonike.[580]

In 1302–1303, Michael and Maria settled in Thessalonike. While political differences between Michael and his father may have played a role in their relocation,[581] the sources suggest that the young emperor was needed in Thessaly to shield the surrounding territories from foreign invasions and, later, to defend them from the armies of the Grand Catalan Company. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Andronikos had originally hired these men to protect the eastern border of the empire and reconquer the Anatolian territories occupied by the Turks; however, the mercenaries failed in their mission and soon returned to the empire to terrorize the cities and villages surrounding Gallipolis. After plundering Thrace, Macedonia, and the monasteries of Athos, they went on to decimate and occupy the Burgundian Duchy of Athens and Thebes in 1311.[582]

573 *Pachymeres* III, 219 f. (IX,1).

574 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 76, n. 10. The chronicler recorded Michael's coronation on May 21, 1294, adding that the young emperor was married to Empress Maria; however, their wedding took place eight months later on January 16, 1295.

575 *Pachymeres* III, 233 (IX,6).

576 For details, see *PLP*, n. 195.

577 The death of Theophano is mentioned a second time by Pachymeres (*Pachymeres* IV, 313 (X,3)). The sources do not indicate the cause of death, but the long interval between Maria-Rita's illness on Rhodes and Theodora-Theophano's journey to Thessalonike makes it unlikely that Theodora died of the same disease that originally afflicted her sister.

578 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 76, n. 11a. See also Ševčenko (1975), 25, fn. 36. *Gregoras* I, 283 (VIII,1).

579 *Van Dieten* II/1, 194, n. 192.

580 *Pachymeres* IV, 307 (X,1). See also Malamut (2003), 276.

581 Bosch (1965), 9.

582 For details, see *ODB* I, 389.

Before she left Constantinople, Maria had to say good-bye to her very young sons, Andronikos and Manuel, who were to remain at the court of their grandfather. Her daughters apparently moved west with their parents. Anna married Thomas Angelos of Epiros in 1313,[583] and Theodora became the wife of Theodore Svetoslav of Bulgaria in 1308.[584]

Despite a fairly large family and her duties as head of the imperial household, Maria did not lose contact with her home country. She must have been grieved by the news that her brother Smbat had strangled Thoros III and blinded Hethoum II in order to seize the throne in 1296. Two years later, Constantine III (another brother) overthrew Smbat I but stepped down soon afterwards (1299). Hethoum II ascended the throne once more and ruled until 1305 when he abdicated in favor of Lewon IV (1305–1308), the son of Thoros III. However, as the latter was a minor, Hethoum continued to rule in his stead.[585] Maria's continued interest in her home country can be seen in her visit to Lesser Armenia (1308/9?) as well as in the assistance she gave her family. In 1317, she summoned her nephew, Guy de Lusignan, to Byzantium and made arrangements for him to establish himself in the empire by marrying the daughter of General Syrgiannes.[586]

The empress and the brigand

While the sources do not often mention Maria once she had left the capital, they do record one generous gesture she made toward her husband. Soon after his return from a military venture in Pegai in January 1304, Michael headed north to stop a Bulgarian attack. He needed money to equip his experienced soldiers from Asia Minor and decided to sell most of his personal gold and silver vessels, many of which had been part of his wife's dowry. His (and Maria's) sacrifice paid off as the Byzantine army soon reconquered the lost territories and stemmed the invasion.[587]

As consort of the junior emperor, Maria sometimes accompanied her husband on his ventures[588] or joined him in the various cities where he carried out his administrative and governmental duties. During one such stay in Adrianople, she witnessed a dramatic scene involving the leader of the Grand Catalan Company,

583 Laiou (1972), 257. On Thomas, see *PLP*, n. 197. According to *PLP*, Anna may have married as early as 1307 (see n. 21344).

584 *Kantakouzenos* I, 11 f. (Praefatio, I,1). *Gregoras* I, 283 (VIII,1). See also Laiou (1972), 170 f.

585 *Gregoras* I, 283 (VIII,1). Toumanoff (1966), 634 f.

586 *Gregoras* II, 623 (XII,15). For details on this interesting personality, see *Van Dieten* III, 273, n. 122. See also Binon (1937) and Binon (1938), 382 f.

587 *Pachymeres* IV, 489 f. (XI,28). The empress was apprised of her husband's progress by Michael's uncle, Theodore Palaiologos (see *ibid.*, 491).

588 When Michael returned from Asia Minor, Maria went to meet him at Pegai and spent several days with him in various cities before they entered Constantinople. See *Pachymeres* IV, 447 (XI,18).

Roger de Flor.[589] In late April 1305, Michael had come to Adrianople to try to make peace with de Flor, and Maria was also in the city. The Alans, another group of mercenaries hired by Andronikos II to fight the Turks, had allegedly become incensed by the imperial settlement with the Catalans; on April 30, 1305,[590] they assassinated Roger in Maria's apartment, where the captain had fled seeking refuge.[591] At that moment, she was apparently in considerable danger, for the first thing Michael IX asked on learning of Roger's death was whether or not his wife was alive.[592] The news of their leader's murder enraged the Catalan soldiers, who began a conquest of territories in Thrace and Thessaly. The contingent eventually settled in Athens, accepted the nominal control and protection of Frederick II of Sicily, and continued to rule the surrounding territories until 1388.[593]

For three years after the assassination of de Flor, the sources do not mention Maria, who seems to have returned to the safety of Thessalonike. She was not the only empress in the city at the time as Thessalonike was being governed by Eirene of Montferrat, the second wife of Andronikos II. The sources do not mention how well the two empresses got along with one another, but considering the enmity between Eirene-Yolanda and her stepson, the two women probably lived their separate lives in their (separate) palaces with the senior empress being chiefly responsible for the government of the city and the surrounding region.[594] Despite the city's strong walls, Maria's life in Thessalonike was not always peaceful. In the spring of 1308, the city was besieged by the armies of the Catalan Company, which planned to conquer Thessalonike and winter there.[595] Both empresses must have been greatly relieved when imperial troops forced the Catalans to retreat.

Maria and the Orthodox Church[596]

Imperial records suggest that Maria became actively involved in matters related to the Orthodox Church despite her foreign origin, implying that she eventually

589 For the relations of the imperial court with Roger de Flor, see *Pachymeres* IV, 575 f. (XII,24). For the arrival of de Flor in Byzantium and his dealings with the Byzantine court, see *Gregoras* I, 218–224 (VI,9).

590 *Pachymeres* IV, 574, fn. 98. *Gregoras* I, 224 (VII,3), 226 (VII,4). For further details, see Nicol (1972B), 138 f.

591 *Pachymeres* IV, 575 (XII,24).

592 *Pachymeres* IV, 575 f. (XII,24).

593 For details, see *ODB* I, 389. For further details on the Catalans in Byzantium, see, e.g., *Gregoras* I, 227–232 (VII,4).

594 For separate residences, see Tantsis (2014), 79.

595 *Gregoras* I, 245 (VII,6).

596 For an overview of the history and theological development of the Armenian Church, see Der Nersessian (1947), 29–54.



Ill. 5: *Ruins of a Palaiologan palace in Thessalonike, the possible residence of several late Byzantine empresses. (Photo: Petra Melichar)*

acquired a good command of the Greek language.[597] In a letter written during his second patriarchate (June 1303–September 1309),[598] Athanasios I praised Maria's piety (orthodoxy) and described her as "greatly involved in the attempts for a peaceful union of the Church."[599] Nevertheless, he warned her not to give any support to the schismatics so as not to encourage them to continue in their error.

In her edition of the patriarchal correspondence, Dr. Talbot suggested that Maria's efforts concerned a reconciliation with the Arsenites,[600] which corresponds

597 The sources do not mention how empresses learned the Greek language. It is possible that the Armenian court, with its long history of cultural connections with Byzantium, taught royal children the basics of Greek, the (former) *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean world.

598 *Athanasios*, 72: Athanasios expressly mentions that the [Orthodox] Church was granted to him by Christ, which suggests that he wrote the letter while he held the patriarchal office.

599 *Athanasios*, 70.

600 *Athanasios*, 343.

well with the dating of the missive; however, the letter could be interpreted another way. At the time in question, the empress had left for Lesser Armenia, probably to attend to some private or family matters.[601] If this journey took place in 1308–1309, there would be reason to suppose that the patriarch's letter concerned Lesser Armenia rather than the Arsenites. In 1308, anti-Catholic and anti-Western Armenian barons murdered Maria's brother Hethoum and her nephew Lewon IV, and another of the empress's brothers, Oshin I (1308–1320), became king.[602] In light of these events, it is possible that Maria went to her homeland to mourn her relatives and perhaps to promote the cause of Orthodoxy. With Lesser Armenia now completely surrounded by the Turks, Maria's visit may also have been connected with diplomatic exchanges between the two remaining Christian countries in the East.

At the time, the Armenian Church was united with Rome (1198–1375) even though it maintained its ancient teachings and rituals. From the perspective of the Constantinopolitan patriarch, Maria's family was Catholic (and therefore heretic). As the letter does not contain enough detail to clearly identify the heretics in question, Athanasios may have been concerned lest the empress become entangled in what was to him a heretical church and abandon Orthodoxy. In respect to the patriarchal initiative for a union with the Armenian Church, Athanasios's missive does not point to any particular effort, but a later document by Patriarch Isaias (1323–1332), written to the Katholikos of Lesser Armenia in April 1330 or 1331, indicates that such plans did, in fact, exist.[603]

Loss and the taking of the veil

After the death of Empress Eirene in 1317[604] and the wedding of (their son) Andronikos III and Eirene-Adelheid of Braunschweig-Grubenhagen in 1318, Michael and Maria settled in Thessalonike permanently.[605] In the bitter years that followed, the imperial family suffered a series of grievous losses, beginning with the death of their oldest daughter. Anna was married to the Epirote despot, who was subsequently strangled by his nephew, Nicolo Orsini, the Count of Kephallonia. Forced to marry Nicolo,[606] the princess, who had no children, died soon afterwards while still in her early twenties (1319).[607] The following year, tragedy struck anew when the guards of Andronikos III killed his younger brother, Despot Manuel.[608]

601 *Athanasios*, 70.
602 Toumanoff (1966), 635.
603 *Darrouzès, Regestes* IV, 117 f., n. 2158.
604 She was the second wife of Andronikos II.
605 *Gregoras* I, 277 (VII,12).
606 *Gregoras* I, 283 (VIII,1).
607 *Kantakouzenos* I, 13 (I,1).
608 *Kantakouzenos* I, 13 (I,1). *Gregoras* I, 285 f. (VIII,3). Gregoras explains that Andronikos believed his mistress had another lover and had ordered his guards to kill the man.

A poem in honor of Manuel, written by Manuel Philes at Maria's behest, poignantly describes her fate: how she arrived from the 'land of Cilicia' and led a happy life as empress and mother until the loss of her son made her the 'Empress Xene, the wearer of rags.'[609] That loss was not yet the end of Maria's sufferings, however. Michael IX, who was not a man of robust health,[610] took the deaths of his children very hard. He died shortly after Manuel on October 12, 1320,[611] and was buried in Thessalonike.[612]

Soon after the deaths of her son and husband, Maria took the veil and assumed the name Xene (foreigner, nun). It was an uncommon choice in the late Byzantine period even though it had earlier been used by the Komnenian empresses Eirene-Piroška, the wife of John II Komnenos, and Maria of Antioch, the widow of Manuel I Komnenos. While the sources do not comment on Maria's reasons for choosing this particular name, she probably needed to express both her foreignness and her loneliness at this difficult time of her life. Even after taking her vows, the empress remained involved in local politics (as later events indicate). It seems that she continued her pious life in the palace, having succeeded to the position of senior empress after the death of her stepmother-in-law.

Maria and the First Civil War

The empress-nun was not allowed to find peace in seclusion, for the fateful year of 1320 marked an escalation in the evolving conflict between her father-in-law and her remaining son, Andronikos. The young heir, who had been separated from his parents very early in life, had grown into a wild youth and had surrounded himself with similarly minded noblemen, among whom John Kantakouzenos held a prominent position. Eager to change the course of political events, the prince stood in opposition to the policies of his grandfather. The younger Andronikos wanted to rebuild the army and navy and then use this imperial might to crush the enemies of the empire. Andronikos II held his grandson responsible for the unfortunate death of Despot Manuel, however, and ordered the name of Andronikos III to be omitted from the oaths taken by imperial officials[613] (indicating that he planned to choose another successor). The following year, Andronikos's headstrong tendencies turned into full-scale rebellion.[614]

Whether his death was accidental or intentional, Manuel found himself in the wrong place at the wrong time.

609 *Manuelis Philae Carmina* I, 235 f.

610 Pachymeres describes an earlier illness (in 1303) that nearly proved fatal for Michael. For details, see *Pachymeres* IV, 427 f. (XI,10).

611 *Kantakouzenos* I, 13 f. (I,1). *Gregoras* I, 277 (VII,12), 286 (VIII,3).

612 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 76, n. 11c.

613 *Kantakouzenos* I, 16 f. (I,2). *Dölger, Regesten* IV, 83, n. 2444.

614 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 77, n. 13a.

What had begun as a family dispute soon turned into all-out civil war. Andronikos II dispatched his son, Despot Constantine, to secure Thessalonike. He also ordered Constantine to send Maria to the capital to prevent her from using her power and resources to support her son. Kantakouzenos records a dramatic scene in which the empress entered the church on the day of her enforced departure and embraced the icon of the Mother of God, refusing to leave the city. Maria was well aware that her transfer to Constantinople could only lead to imprisonment and separation from her supporters. Her gesture reflects a similar action taken by the famous Anna Dalassene, who clutched the Holy Doors in Hagia Sophia and refused to let go until she was assured that the emperor meant her no harm.[615] Unable to persuade Maria with words, Constantine resorted to force and called in three officers to escort her to the ship.[616] Once in Constantinople, the empress became a prisoner of her father-in-law and was held in the eastern part of the palace.[617]

According to the account of Gregoras, the despot also secured Maria's adherents in Thessalonike,[618] an action that certainly highlights her political involvement and influence even though the sources do not offer details as to the size and political orientation of her court. In July 1322, fortune began to favor Andronikos III, who quickly gained both land and followers. To safeguard his life should his grandson seize the capital, and perhaps to gain time as well, the elder Andronikos released Maria from the palace and sent her to mediate between himself and her son. The meeting of the empress and her son, which took place in Epibatai close to Selymbria, was apparently an emotional one, for it was their first encounter since the death of Michael IX. After they had mourned the emperor's passing and discussed various (political?) matters, Maria returned to her father-in-law with a signed treaty, the precise content of which is unknown since the peace it brought was short-lived and hostilities between the two emperors soon resurfaced.[619]

The sources offer few clues to the empress's whereabouts following her mission. According to Gregoras, Andronikos III came to Constantinople soon after signing the treaty and, after an official, public meeting with his grandfather, built his camp close to the Church of the Hodegetria tes Peges, from which he repeatedly

615 *Anna Komnene*, 65–69 (II,V). Hill (1999), 70.
616 *Kantakouzenos* I, 129 f. (I,26), 149 f. (I,31). Andronikos III later punished Constantine and his officers most severely for their behavior towards his mother. See also *Van Dieten* II/1, 163–165, n. 119. Dr. Malamut suggests that Maria had attempted to separate Thessalonike from the empire, and that is why Andronikos II sent his son to bring her to Constantinople. For details, see Malamut (2003), 275. See also Gill (1985), 43.
617 *Gregoras* I, 354 (VIII,11).
618 *Ibid.*
619 *Kantakouzenos* I, 166 f. (I,34). *Gregoras* I, 358 f. (VIII,11). *Van Dieten* II/1, 168 f, n. 130. Melichar (2017), 118 f.

visited the city before returning to his wife in Didymoteichon.[620] A manuscript of Gregoras's text, known as *MHO,* includes the following information:

> His mother, the empress, also stayed at the Church of the Very Holy Theotokos [Hodegetria tes Peges], partly because of her illness and partly to be close to her beloved son. With the empress was also the daughter of the emperor, the *kralaina* Simonis, who had recently come back from Serbia after the death of her husband. She regularly informed her father the emperor about what was whispered here and there.[621]

The text implies that Maria-Xene's health had deteriorated, perhaps due to the traumatic events of the preceding years. While the sources do not tell us whether the miraculous waters of the famous shrine had a salutary effect on her condition, spending time with her remaining son must have brought her joy. It is somewhat surprising to find Princess Simonis, who became a nun in the Convent of St. Andrew in Krisei after her return from Serbia in 1321, in Maria-Xene's company. It may be that Simonis wished to serve the aging, ailing empress, but the historian is probably not far from the truth when he points out Simonis's value as an informant to Andronikos II.

In the years that followed, Maria remained in Constantinople. She may have been free to move about the city but was probably not allowed to leave it. It was in the Byzantine capital, in 1323–24, that Maria learned that her widowed sister and her sister's two sons, who had returned to Lesser Armenia after the death of Amalric of Lusignan, had been murdered.[622] Around the same time, two other tragedies occurred in Maria's family: the infant son of Andronikos III and his wife Eirene died, and the young mother died several months later.

Maria's continued presence in Constantinople after the reconciliation of Andronikos II and Andronikos III (and her subsequent release from captivity) suggests that she wished to support her son and help him navigate the turbulent political waters of the empire. It may have been during this time that she developed an intense dislike for the Kantakouzenos clan. She came to distrust their motives and counted Theodora, the mother of John Kantakouzenos, an enemy. Theodora was an accomplished politician with sizeable financial means and an extensive network of prominent contacts, but despite their similarities, the two women did not get along. Either Maria was jealous of Theodora's influence over her son or she suspected the woman's motives in supporting Andronikos.

620 *Kantakouzenos* I, 169 f. (I,34). *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 77, n. 13b.

621 *Van Dieten* II/1, 170, n. 132. Unfortunately, I did not have access to this manuscript.

622 Toumanoff (1966), 635. Isabella and her children were murdered by Oshin, Count of Korikos, who had married the widow of Oshin I and was acting as regent for the heir to the throne, Lewon V, who was a minor. By murdering Isabella and her offspring, the count wished to lessen the pro-Western influence at the Armenian court.

Still, this was not an unhappy time for Maria-Xene. She must have been relieved when, in February 1325, her son was recognized as heir to the empire and crowned in Hagia Sophia.[623] Though the sources do not explicitly mention her presence, she probably witnessed the occasion and perhaps attended her son's wedding to Anna of Savoy (1326) as well.

Maria's support of Andronikos III in the final phase of the war

In 1327,[624] Andronikos II allowed Maria to return to Thessalonike "in order to enter the convent in which she had taken the monastic veil."[625] She was on her way to Thessaly when she received news that the conflict between her son and father-in-law had re-ignited.[626] Fearing for her freedom and safety (and believing both Andronikos II and his allies in Thessaly to be a threat), Maria remained in Gratianoupolis to await the arrival of her son. She and Andronikos spent a few days together, possibly planning their next moves.[627] According to Gregoras, Maria proceeded to invite her daughter Theodora, whom she had not seen for many years, and Theodora's new husband, the Bulgarian tsar Michael III Šišman,[628] to her residence in Didymoteichon (May 1327).[629] The meeting proved a political success when the two rulers concluded a military alliance.[630] Nevertheless, the

623 For example, see *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 77, n. 15.

624 The dating of Maria's departure from Constantinople is complicated as is determining the nature of her involvement in the political plans of her son. Van Dieten suggests that she may have left for Thessalonike before July 1327 to secure the support of her acquaintances for Andronikos III. *Van Dieten* II/1, 208, n. 221.

625 *Kantakouzenos* I, 260 (I,52).

626 *Ibid.* Binon (1938), 381, fn. 1.

627 *Kantakouzenos* I, 260 f. (I,52).

628 Theodore Svetoslav, Theodora's first husband, died in 1321–1322. Unlike most Byzantine princesses, the childless Theodora decided to remain in Bulgaria. Perhaps she did not want to return to her home country during a civil war. She did not become a nun and lived in Tarnovo as a widow. In 1325, she married the new tsar of Bulgaria, Michael Šišman, who ascended the throne in 1323. Two years later, he repudiated his first wife, a Serbian princess by whom he already had children, and married Theodora (1325–1326, see *Van Dieten* II/1, 190 f., n. 191 for the full argumentation).

629 *Gregoras* I, 391 (IX,3).

630 For further details, see *Van Dieten* II/1, 192–194, fn. 192. *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 78, 8, 18. *Kantakouzenos* I, 207 f. (I,42). (According to his description, the meeting took place in Černomen on the Marica at the request of the Bulgarian tsar and at the command of Andronikos II. Andronikos III and Michael joined forces following the reopening of hostilities. Concerning the conflicting information provided by the two historians, Van Dieten considers holding two meetings within such a short time very unlikely.)

account of Gregoras contrasts starkly with that of Kantakouzenos, who does not mention Maria-Xene but claims that the meeting took place in Černomen on the Marica[631] at the request of Andronikos II. According to Kantakouzenos, it was only on Andronikos III's return to Constantinople, after the negotiations at Černomen, that the young emperor learned of a new outbreak of hostilities initiated by his grandfather.[632]

It is difficult to establish which of the two versions accurately portrays these events. Gregoras's account seems more probable given Maria-Xene's distrust of the motives of the Kantakouzenos clan. Kantakouzenos, who had reasons to keep the empress-mother out of the political scene (or at least out of the record), tended to edit his memoirs to suit his own purposes. Thus, it remains unclear whether there were two meetings, one before the renewal of hostilities and one after it, or only one. The fact that Kantakouzenos had reasons to distort his account speaks against his version in this case. Nevertheless, it remains beyond doubt that Andronikos met with the Bulgarian royal couple in 1327 and forged a political alliance with the tsar.[633]

At the beginning of the following year, Maria accompanied her son to Thessalonike and, later, back to Constantinople no doubt in order to support him at the outset of his reign. It was then that her conflict with the Kantakouzenes came to a head. When John Kantakouzenos, who repeatedly misjudged the character and reliability of his followers, persuaded Andronikos to release the capable but faithless General Syrgiannes, the empress was outraged. She reproached Kantakouzenos for not discussing the matter with her before the decision had been made and claimed that an enemy of the emperor must remain a prisoner for life.[634] This perceptive piece of advice went unheeded. Jealous of the power of the Kantakouzenes and frustrated because Andronikos refused to see that Kantakouzenos did not 'love him as much as his own career,'[635] Maria returned to Thessalonike (see Ill. 5).

The chancery of Empress Maria

Like other empresses, Maria operated a chancery of her own. The documents which have been preserved mostly reflect the empress's charity to monastic foundations. In March 1322, Andronikos III confirmed the *horismos* issued to the Monastery of the Prodromos by the 'very holy lady and empress, mother of my imperial majesty.' The document had exempted the monastery from the annual tax several years earlier.[636] According to Barišić, Maria also issued a document allowing the monks

631 *Kantakouzenos* I, 207 f. (I,42). Bosch (1965), 62. Nicol (1996A), 24.
632 See *Van Dieten* II/1, 186, n. 184.
633 For details, see *Gregoras* I, 391 f. (IX,1).
634 *Kantakouzenos* I, 335 (II,4). Binon (1938), 380.
635 *Kantakouzenos* II, 93 (III,14). *Van Dieten* II/2, 313, n. 279.
636 *Actes de St. Jean Prodrome*, 54, n. 26.

of the Chilandar Monastery to construct a mill close to Chandax in August 1321 (which suggests that she owned the land).[637]

Following the pattern set by her predecessors, Maria's seals bear the enthroned Theotokos holding the Christ Child on her lap on the obverse and an image of Maria, wearing a high crown decorated by pendants, on the reverse. The empress is standing, and her wide-sleeved *divitision* and *loros* are adorned by squares with a pearl in the middle of each; pearls line the upper hem as well. In her right hand she holds a jewel-encrusted scepter; her left hand rests on her chest. The border of the seal is decorated with dots, and the inscription presents her as 'Μαρία εὐσεβεστάτη α[ὐ]γού[στ]α Δούκενα ἡ Παλαιολογίνα' (Maria the most pious augusta Doukaina Palaiologina).[638]

Ambassador for peace

Despite the allegedly cordial meetings of Andronikos III and his brother-in-law, the relationship between Byzantium and Bulgaria began to deteriorate once Andronikos III entered Constantinople in May 1328. A month later, Michael of Bulgaria attacked the border territories of the empire, and both sides prepared for war. Concerned for the welfare of both her son and her son-in-law, Maria-Xene intervened:

> The situation of the Romans was dangerous and troubled. The mother and lady feared for her son and sent to both [rulers] messengers to mediate an agreement. In the end she did effect reconciliation as she was the mother of both and therefore did not hold herself back in reproaching each of them as she saw fit. Thus, a contract was made, and Michael returned home with rich gifts.[639]

In October of the same year, Maria-Xene prevented another conflict when she helped mediate a new agreement between Andronikos and Michael Šišman, this time concerning the latter's desire to receive part of the imperial inheritance as the husband of the young emperor's sister.[640] As a result of her intervention, a peace treaty was signed in Krenna,[641] according to which Michael returned the Bukeleon Fortress and Andronikos bound himself to pay Michael regular tribute. Perhaps fortunately for Byzantium, the belligerent Michael died two years later in a battle against the Serbian king at Velbužd (1330).

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637 *Actes de Chilandar*, 154 f., n. 68. See also Barišić (1971), 166–170. For Barišić's argument for August 1321, see Barišić (1971), 167–170.

638 For a detailed study of Maria's seal, see Seibt (1987), 115–118, n. 32. Zacos–Veglery (1972) I/1, 122, n. 126.

639 *Gregoras* I, 431 (IX,8). Once again, Kantakouzenos omitted Maria from the record. See *Kantakouzenos* I, 324–327 f. (II,3).

640 *Kantakouzenos* I, 325 (II,3). *Dölger, Regesten* IV, 136 f., n. 2722.

641 *Dölger, Regesten* IV, 137, n. 2723.

Uncertain times: Andronikos's illness and the adoption of Syrgiannes

In 1329, Andronikos III became gravely ill.[642] Believing that the end of his life was near, he decided to pass the regency of his unborn child to his wife, Anna of Savoy, and the *megas domestikos*, John Kantakouzenos, thereby shutting his mother out of the government.[643] In his *Memoirs*, Kantakouzenos describes how his own mother, Theodora Kantakouzene, asked Andronikos three times for orders regarding the role of Maria-Xene in the government should he pass away but always received the same answer: the empire could not be ruled by two women who did not have a close relationship.[644] Once again, it is difficult to take Katakouzenos at his word, for he clearly feared the possibility of the regency falling into the hands of both the emperor's young wife and his politically astute and experienced mother, neither of whom was favorably inclined towards his family.[645] His consistent efforts to exclude the dowager empress from the court and the government of the empire indicate that he considered her a clever and powerful woman and, of the two women, the more dangerous adversary. While Kantakouzenos flaunts his benevolence toward the empress, describing how he sent her a cross decorated with precious stones along with the message of her son's condition and how he assured Maria-Xene of his own respect for her,[646] the empress was not impressed by this display of 'kindness' as the account of Gregoras notes:

> If her son, the emperor, died and someone other than her assumed the government of the empire, she would despair of her life. For it would be impossible, said she, that the *megas domestikos* Kantakouzenos and his mother would allow her, an empress, to live if they so unexpectedly became regents and governors of the empire, for both had been her enemies for a long time.[647]

As for the emperor's decision to exclude Maria-Xene from the regency,[648] considering the complexity of her relations with the Kantakouzenes, he may have been apprehensive about his mother's ability to get on with the *megas domestikos*. Whatever his reasons, the decision must have been difficult for Maria to accept since she had repeatedly proven both her political aptitude and her loyalty to her son.

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642 *Kantakouzenos* I, 393 f. (II,14). *Gregoras* I, 439 (IX,10). Barišić identified the illness as malaria. Barišić (1971), 165.
643 *Kantakouzenos* I, 395 (II,15), II, 91 (III,14). *Gregoras* I, 440 (IX,10). For commentary on this scene, see *Van Dieten* II/2, 312 f., n. 279. See also Bosch (1965), 180 f.
644 *Kantakouzenos* I, 395 (II,15), II, 91 ff. (III,14). Binon (1938), 381. *Van Dieten* II/1, 312 f., n. 279.
645 See also *Van Dieten* II/2, 319, n. 283.
646 *Kantakouzenos* II, 91–95 (III,14). *Van Dieten* II/2, 314, 316 n. 279.
647 *Gregoras* I, 440 f. (IX,10). Translation mine. Bosch (1965), 92.
648 *Gregoras* I, 440 (IX,10). Nicol (1996A), 31, 34. Gill (1985), 44.

It was under these circumstances that Maria took an unusual step at the beginning of 1330. After his promotion to the office of overlord of the 'western lands and castles' (κεφαλὴ τῶν κατὰ δύσιν κάστρων καὶ χωρῶν), General Syrgiannes, who had settled in Thessalonike as governor, soon involved the widowed empress (who was related to him by marriage through her nephew[649]) in his schemes against Kantakouzenos.[650] Maria, who may have feared for her life (or at least her freedom) should her son die, consented to enter into an agreement with the faithless general even though he had repeatedly betrayed Andronikos III and she herself had previously been an ardent opponent of his. Perhaps it was the family connection, combined with a joint hatred for the Kantakouzenos clan, that prompted her actions.[651] To secure the general's loyalty, Maria adopted Syrgiannes (εἰσποεῖται τὸν Συργιάννην),[652] a man whom Angeliki Laiou described as a "dark, scheming figure who would become the most evil presence in the civil war defecting from one emperor to the other, urging them both to continue fighting" and who "tried to serve his personal ambitions, whatever the cost to anyone else."[653]

It was an interesting political move, one that had been used by previous Byzantine empresses, including Maria of Alania, who supported the emergence of a new dynasty by her adoption of Alexios Komnenos towards the end of the eleventh century. Maria realized that she needed to bind Syrgiannes to her party in order to acquire the protection she craved. Still, she could not have been ignorant of the significance of her action. As her adopted son, Syrgiannes would have a claim to the throne if Andronikos III died without an heir.[654] Although his chances were small in light of the fact that Andronikos II had three other sons, Syrgiannes may have hoped that, as ruler of Thessalonike and as a capable military leader, he could found a new dynasty – as had often been the case in Byzantine history. It seems that Maria-Xene was pursuing another goal as well. She had Syrgiannes and the soldiers and citizens of Thessalonike swear loyalty 'unto death' to her and promise that they would consider her their ruler. In the event of her son's death, they were to extend this loyalty to his posterity. In this manner, the empress attempted to secure Thessalonike for the imperial dynasty and create legal grounds against Kantakouzenos's acting as the protector of her future grandchild.[655] Though she

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649 Gregoras ascribes the initiative to Maria-Xene. *Gregoras* I, 440 (IX,10). For details, see Binon (1938), 381 f.

650 Lemerle (1945), 195.

651 *Gregoras* II, 623 (XII,15). Binon (1938), 382 f.

652 *Gregoras* I, 441 (IX,10). Binon (1938), 381. Mentioned later as well, see *Gregoras* I, 489 (X,5). On the practice of politically motivated adoption, see Macrides (1992), 265 f. For further details on the practice of adoption in Byzantium, see Macrides (1990), especially 117 f. Nicol (1972B), 181 f.

653 Laiou (1972), 288.

654 On the pretensions of Syrgiannes, see *Van Dieten* II/2, 313 f., 316, n. 279.

655 Parisot (1845), 122–124. *Van Dieten* II/2, 315, n. 279. Weiss (1969), 29.

could not prevent the eventual rise of the Kantakouzenes, her deeds indicate a deep loyalty towards her son (despite their divergent opinions) and the imperial family.

In the meantime, noblemen who had reason to dislike Kantakouzenos flocked to her court. They railed against the *megas domestikos*, saying that instead of securing the regency for both empresses (suggesting that, as senior empress, Maria-Xene had a greater right to the empire than her daughter-in-law, who had not yet produced a male heir), he had taken over the government, using Empress Anna as a cover for his evil intentions.[656] They urged Maria-Xene to warn her son of the wicked schemes of Kantakouzenos since they believed that he was planning to seize power after Andronikos's death. Acting on their counsel, Maria travelled to Constantinople at the beginning of 1330.[657] Andronikos purportedly refused to listen to her and denounced her informers as slanderers. He not only continued to show favor to Kantakouzenos but even recounted to him the conversations he had had with his mother.[658] In return, the *megas domestikos* told Andronikos that he had known the reason for Maria's visit beforehand as a similar group had approached him and attempted to persuade him to revile the empress-mother and turn her son against her, a course of action he had firmly refused.[659] To support his claims, Kantakouzenos revealed the identity of Maria-Xene's advisors when he wrote that it was Syrgiannes and a former protégé of his, Alexios Apokaukos, who persuaded the dowager empress that he (Kantakouzenos) had had the Byzantine officials swear fealty to Anna and her child only, believing that, as a foreigner, Anna would be dependent on his advice and leave him to rule Byzantium with a free hand in her son's name.[660]

Blinded by her anger and fear of the Kantakouzenos clan, Maria-Xene underestimated the ambition of her advisors and thus unwittingly supported the two men who later caused so much damage to the dynasty and the empire. The sources remain silent regarding the relationship of the widowed empress and the treacherous general in the following years; however, it is likely that their alliance was shattered when Syrgiannes entered into another open revolt against Andronikos III in 1332.

Death

The aging and disappointed Maria-Xene returned to Thessalonike, where she spent her remaining years (perhaps in the convent where she had taken her vows[661]). She died on June 7, 1333, and was buried in the city. Her final resting place is unknown,

656 *Kantakouzenos* II, 92 f. (III,14).
657 *Fatouros, Kantakouzenos*, 434, n. 132.
658 *Kantakouzenos* II, 93 f. (III,14).
659 *Kantakouzenos* II, 94 f. (III,14).
660 *Kantakouzenos* II, 95–97 (III,14).
661 *Kantakouzenos* I, 260 (I,52).

but she was probably buried close to her late husband[662] or in the Convent of the Prodromos, a monastery she had endowed and possibly even entered after taking her vows. (She had allegedly planned to return there in 1327.[663]) On the occasion of her death, Nikephoros Gregoras wrote a monody and delivered it in front of the emperor.[664] Unfortunately, like most specimens of this genre, it does not contain any useful details concerning Maria's life or character. While her story was full of unexpected turns, her piety was unblemished, and her name remains inscribed in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*,[665] duly remembered by Orthodox believers throughout the generations.

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The fate of Maria is moving even in the wider context of the complicated lives of the other late Byzantine empresses. While the death of siblings, spouses, and even sons was a common experience in the Middle Ages, among the late Byzantine empresses, Maria stands out as being especially well-acquainted with this reality. Her father and several siblings died when she was still young. Next, she lost several brothers and both remaining sisters, some of whom died a violent death. Death also separated her from two of her children as well as her husband. She herself had struggled with grave illness on her journey to Byzantium, and in her later years, ill health forced her to seek help at the healing springs of the Pege Monastery. But surrounded as she was by death, Maria never gave up on life. Despite her foreign origins, she mastered Greek and adjusted to the local culture well enough to create a political network in Byzantium and acquire a strong following in Thessalonike.

Even though she unwittingly chose as her advisors two of the most dangerous men of her time (Syrgiannes and Apokaukos), blinded as she was by her distrust towards the Kantakouzenes and by her fear for the future of the dynasty, Maria proved a gifted politician with an active interest in the events of her day. She supported the succession of her son and prevented a military confrontation with the Bulgarians. Even as a nun, the empress frequently left the seclusion dictated by her decision to take the veil. Whether she was inspired by customs from her home country, convenience, or necessity, Maria-Xene was able to travel, lead political negotiations, publish important documents, conclude alliances, and dispatch embassies while robed in the unpretentious attire of a nun.

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662 *Gregoras* I, 490 (X,6). *Kantakouzenos* I, 473 (II,28). Also compare Loenertz (1963), 229. Van Dieten (*Van Dieten* II/2, 344 f., n. 383) argues that Gregoras's having performed his speech in front of Andronikos III indicates that the emperor was not present at the funeral. Nevertheless, the matter is not entirely clear. As Lynda Garland noted while reading this manuscript, such speeches could also be delivered later at a commemoration service. Loenertz, on the other hand, considers it a certainty that Andronikos did participate in the ceremony (see Loenertz (1964), 226, fn. 12).

663 *Kantakouzenos* I, 260 (I,52).

664 *Gregoras* I, 490–495 (X,6).

665 *Gouillard, Synodikon,* 101.

V The Lonely Empress: Eirene-Adelheid (of Braunschweig-Grubenhagen) (1318–1324)

Introduction

In March 1318,[666] Patriarch John Glykys[667] celebrated the wedding of Andronikos III and Adelheid of Braunschweig-Grubenhagen. Though the chronicles do not explain why Andronikos II had turned to Germany in his search for a bride for his grandson, a closer inquiry into Palaiologan dynastic politics offers certain clues. The imperial family had close ties with the Marquisate of Montferrat both through Andronikos's second marriage to Eirene-Yolanda of Montferrat and through his son Theodore, who became the ruler of the marquisate in 1306. Two generations earlier, Alessina of Montferrat had become the second wife of Albrecht I, Duke of Braunschweig-Lüneburg, whose dominion was located in Lower Saxony.[668] Their son, Heinrich I, and his wife, Agnes von Meissen, had twelve children, the seventh of whom was a princess named Adelheid (*1293).[669]

How the court on the Bosphorus learned about her remains uncertain. Theodore of Montferrat may have suggested one of the daughters of the duke, his distant kin, as a suitable bride in the course of a visit to the empire. Heinrich's excommunication at the hands of Pope John XXII in 1318 was also significant, for the anathema eliminated the necessity of requesting papal consent for the marriage.[670] The fact that the Braunschweig-Grubenhagen family (part of the powerful Welf clan) was loosely allied with the Angevins, the dangerous Western adversaries of the late Byzantine emperors, may also have played a role in Andronikos's choice. Though the Angevin threat had subsided, the emperor must have had vivid memories of the early 1280s, when the excellent (if Machiavellian) diplomacy of his father, Michael VIII, had averted an invasion planned by Charles I of Anjou in Sicily.[671]

666 *Gregoras* I, 277 (VII,13). For the dating, see Van Dieten (*Van Dieten* I, 208). Laiou (1972), 252. Ohnsorge (1951), 438. Politis (1957), 317. Papadopoulos (1938), 43, 68.

667 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 76, n. 11b; II, 225 f.

668 For details on the house, see Zimmermann (1911). Pischke (2000).

669 *PLP*, n. 21356. See also *Fatouros, Kantakouzenos* I, 226, n. 66. For her lineage, see Isenburg (1953), table 68. *Van Dieten* I, 299, n. 472. Ohnsorge (1951). Nicol (1972B), 161. See also Ohnsorge (1951), 437 f.

670 Zimmermann (1911), 2.

671 For further details, see Dabrowska (1996), 28 ff. In her study on late Byzantine empresses of Latin origin, Dabrowska stresses the Anjou threat as the main motivation behind the marriages concluded and planned by Andronikos II. See especially p. 30.

Next to nothing is known about the early life of the Saxon princess. She probably spent her youth in the family residence, Salzderhelden Castle, along with her five sisters and six brothers. Heinrich I was heavily involved in disputes, wars, and politics and did not spend much time at home. Despite the fact that his frequent feuds with his neighbors often resulted in financial difficulties, he was still able to find money to support and endow churches and monasteries. This ability earned him the nickname 'Mirabilis.' He was clearly popular at the court, and the German princes and prelates even considered him a possible successor to the Roman king, Rudolph I of Habsburg. Although another candidate was selected in the end, the Braunschweig-Grubenhagen family remained influential within the German realm.

Consort of the heir to the throne

On her arrival in Byzantium at the age of twenty-five, the Catholic princess converted to Orthodoxy and received the name 'Eirene.' As a grown woman, Eirene was fully capable of assuming a position of responsibility; however, perhaps because there were already two emperors in Byzantium (Andronikos II and Michael IX), the young couple was not crowned following their wedding as was otherwise customary. The dissolute lifestyle of Andronikos III[672] may also have helped shape the decision to postpone the elevation of the young man (and his wife) to imperial honors.

During her short time in the empire, Eirene almost never excited the interest of the historiographers, so there is very little information about her. At first, she was probably preoccupied with learning Greek and mastering the court ceremonial in preparation for her eventual role as a Byzantine empress; however, it seems that the young princess was not very happy in her new home. Allegedly rather plain, she had failed to secure the interest of Andronikos, who was notorious for his pursuits of beautiful Constantinopolitan women.

Eirene and the First Civil War

Eirene's new husband was handsome, athletic, and gifted; nevertheless, his grandfather, Andronikos II, was vexed by the young heir's reckless and debauched behavior. In 1320, when the guards of Andronikos III mistook his brother Manuel for a rival and killed him by mistake, the emperor put Andronikos under house arrest and took steps to deprive him of his imperial position. It is at this point that Eirene, after a four-year silence, appears once more in the Byzantine narrative sources. In the spring of 1321, Andronikos III (supported by some friends from among the young noblemen) decided to flee Constantinople and enter into open rebellion against his grandfather. Discussing their plans, the conspirators had to decide whether the empress should accompany them. While the majority

672 *Gregoras* I, 285 f. (VIII,3).

favored this option, John Kantakouzenos, Andronikos’s closest collaborator, spoke against it. Besides the comfort and safety of the empress, they also had to consider the fact that she was carrying a child. Ultimately, the young emperor decided to leave the capital without his wife.[673] It is not certain whether Eirene knew of her husband’s plans, but she remained in Constantinople until the warring parties had signed their first peace treaty in June 1321.[674] Andronikos then summoned her to Adrianople, where she gave birth to a son soon after her arrival. The child’s name is not mentioned in the sources.[675]

Eirene’s final years

Once she had recovered from the delivery, the empress apparently travelled from Adrianople to Didymoteichon. There, Andronikos put her in charge of the administration of the surrounding territory, leaving with her Theodora Kantakouzene, the mother of John Kantakouzenos, to assist her with her task.[676] It was during this period (August 1321) that Eirene published the only document known to have originated with her, confirming the possession of the *paleochorion* Poungion (close to Thessalonike) by the sons of Alexander Eurippiotes.[677] This document suggests that, like her predecessors, Eirene operated a chancery and made independent decisions in legal matters.[678]

At the beginning of the following year, Eirene’s son died at a mere eight months of age (February 1322).[679] The sources do not mention the burial of the baby, and it is not certain whether Andronikos, engaged in a new round of the civil war, was able to be present at his son’s deathbed. It is likely that Eirene had to make the arrangements for the funeral on her own. The couple was not reunited until late summer of the same year[680] after the two emperors had signed another peace treaty (July 1322) and Andronikos had spent some time with his grandfather in Constantinople.[681]

673 *Kantakouzenos* I, 52–53 (I, 10 f.).
674 For the treaty negotiations, see *Kantakouzenos* I, 109–119 (I,22–23).
675 *Kantakouzenos* I, 119 (I,24). Van Dieten suggests the name ‘Michael,’ after his grandfather Michael IX, as the baptismal name of the little prince. *Van Dieten* I, 158, fn. 117. See also Bosch (1965), 23.
676 *Kantakouzenos* I, 125 (I,25). *Van Dieten* II/1, 161, n. 118.
677 *Actes de Chilandar*, n. 67. For the argumentation that this *horismos* was originally published by Eirene and not Andronikos III, see Barišić (1971), 175–179.
678 Barišić (1971), 198.
679 *Kantakouzenos* I, 119 (I,24). Laiou (1972), 253.
680 *Kantakouzenos* I, 169 (I,34). *Van Diten* II/1, 171, n. 133.
681 For details on this mediation, see the previous chapter. Ursula Bosch suggests that Eirene was with Andronikos during this visit. (Bosch (1965), 34).

Illness and death

Following this reunion, Eirene disappears from the Byzantine chronicles until July 1324. During those two years, she may have remained in Didymoteichon or travelled with her husband between Didymoteichon and Adrianople. In the summer of 1324 at the time of the first harvest, she became ill. Andronikos III, who was planning to go to Constantinople, sent her on ahead, perhaps hoping that she would receive better medical care in the capital. Unfortunately, her condition deteriorated quickly, and she died at Rhadeistos in Thrace on August 16, 1324. Her body was then brought to Constantinople and buried in the Monastery of Lips with all of the honors and ceremonies due an empress.[682] Simultaneously, her name was entered in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*[683] and has been commemorated ever since.

Andronikos III did not attend his wife's funeral. On his way to the capital, he fell ill and spent several days in Bizye. He only learned of Eirene's demise in Herakleia after he had become well enough to travel. As was customary on such occasions,[684] he paused in his journey to spend fifteen days mourning his wife, which resulted in his returning to the capital[685] only after Eirene's burial.

The last testimony to the connection between the Palaiologan and Braunschweig-Grubenhagen families is a document issued by Andronikos III to Eirene's brother, Heinrich II, who left his principality after the death of his wife in 1327 and travelled first to Rome and then to Constantinople. There, he received from the emperor (who may have been gravely ill at this time or soon afterwards[686]) a golden bull granting him safe passage through the eastern territories of the empire.[687] Heinrich journeyed to Sinai, where he visited St. Catherine's Monastery, and then continued on to Cyprus, where he married the daughter of Seneschall Philippe d'Ibelin. While

682 *Kantakouzenos* I, 193 f. (I,40). *Enthym*, 139, n. 47. Gregoras only mentions the death of the empress, her origin, and the fact that she died without a child. *Gregoras* I, 383 (VIII,15). For further details, see *Van Dieten* II/1, 185 f, n. 184. Bosch (1965), 36, 106.

683 *Gouillard*, *Synodikon*, 101, see also fn. 341. To clarify Gouillard's uncertainty in fns. 340 and 341: there are two Eirenes entered in the *Synodikon* following Theodora Palaiologina. The first does not denote Anna of Hungary, who died under the Union of Lyons and whose name was never included in the *Synodikon,* but Eirene-Yolanda of Montferrat (d. 1317). The second stands for Eirene-Adelheid of Braunschweig-Grubenhagen (d. 1324), followed by the mother of Andronikos III, Maria-Rita (d. 1333).

684 *Pseudo-Kodinos* does not mention a mourning period of fifteen days, but the number does appear a second time in the sources: the advisors of John VIII, who were returning with the emperor from the Council of Ferrara/Florence in 1439, decided not to apprise the emperor of his wife's demise as the emperor would have been required to discontinue the journey to the capital and mourn her passing for two weeks in the place where he had learned the news. *Syropoulos*, 542 (IX,20).

685 *Kantakouzenos* I, 193 f. (I,40).

686 The document is dated January 6, 1330. For details, see Ohnsorge (1951).

687 Ohnsorge (1951), 440–447. *Dölger, Regesten* IV, 143 f., n. 2756.

there is no record detailing his stay in Constantinople, it probably included a visit to the Convent of Lips, the final resting place of his sister.

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Though the sources allow for a sketchy reconstruction of Eirene's life, they do not contain anything that throws light on the character or personality of the German princess. Except for one *horismos*, the chronicles mention none of her decisions or voluntary actions. The vignettes where her name occurs suggest a patient, obedient, and passive woman, who came when her husband summoned her, governed Didymoteichon in his stead, and set out for Constantinople at his bidding. It is clear that even though she was surrounded by attendants, Eirene was alone. Her husband, Andronikos III, was primarily concerned with his military pursuits and his love affairs, and the family of her birth was far away. Standing alone by the coffin of her infant son or lying alone on her deathbed in Rhadeistos, Eirene is a melancholy reminder of the isolation that occasionally awaited the Byzantine empress of foreign origin.

VI Anna of Savoy: Nemesis or Savior? (1326–1365/6)

She was an ideal widow, according to the ideals of the apostle Paul, a woman who lived alone, trusted in the Lord, ate only as much as necessary, shunned splendid robes and everything worldly, and served the Lord day and night, using her voice to sing hymns like her namesake the prophetess Anna.[688]

Demetrios Kydones

I believe that she was from a foreign country, merciless by nature and hated all Romans.[689]

Nikephoros Gregoras

Introduction

Soon after Eirene-Adelheid's death, Andronikos II began searching for a new bride for his grandson. As Kantakouzenos informs us, this was both because Andronikos III was still quite young and because he as yet had no heir (the son from his first marriage having died in infancy).[690] It is possible that the senior emperor consulted his son, Theodore of Montferrat, regarding a suitable candidate on one of the latter's rare visits to Constantinople.[691] Well-acquainted with the situation in Italy, Theodore would have known about the daughter of Amadeo V, the count of Savoy, and the traditional anti-papal and anti-French leanings of the Savoyard court would have made it a desirable ally in the eyes of the Byzantine emperor.[692]

688 Tinnefeld (1983), 27 f.
689 *Gregoras* II, 764 (XV,5).
690 *Kantakouzenos* I, 193–196 (I,40), 204 f. (I,42). Laiou (1972), 302–305. Bosch (1965), 106 f.
691 Although there is no direct evidence, the supposition that Theodore suggested Anna as a bride for Andronikos III is tenable. For argumentation, see Origone (1999), 32 f. Muratore (1906), 25 ff. As noted in the previous chapter, Theodore may also have recommended the first wife of Andronikos III, Eirene-Adelheid of Braunschweig-Grubenhagen. Considering the lives and actions of both empresses, his involvement in the imperial matchmaking business reveals the power of a single man to impact the fate of an empire and its ruler.
692 For further details, see Origone (1999), 22. Malamut (2014A), 86. Muratore (1906), 25. On the Savoy family, see also Dabrowska (1996), especially 30 ff., which describes the connection between the Palaiologans and the counts of Savoy.



Ill. 6: *Modern Chambéry (France) with the Belledonne Mountains in the background. (Photo: Florian Pépellin). Original title: Panoramic view of Chambéry with the Belledonne Mountains in the Background. Author: Florian Pépellin. URL: https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chambéry#/media/File:Chamb%C3%A9ry_-_Belledonnes_(Savoie).JPG. Lincence: CC-BY-SA 3.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)*

The prospective bride, Johanna or Giovanna,[693] was born into the family of Amadeo and his second wife, Maria of Brabant, around the year 1306. She was raised at the Savoyard court in Chambéry (see Ill. 6) together with several of her six half-siblings and three sisters.[694] Johanna had grown up surrounded by a court of her own.[695] She lived in various castles, among which the romantic, lakeside Le Bourget held a prominent position. The scanty evidence of the chronicles reveals

693 *PLP*, n. 21347. The literature on Anna, the most famous of the Palaiologan empresses, is extensive and includes, to date, two monographs, three biographical studies, and articles that touch on various aspects of her reign or personality. For the monographs, see Origone (1999) and Muratore (1906). For the studies, see Malamut (2014A), Nicol (1996), 82–95, and the somewhat romantic narrative by Charles Diehl (Diehl (1906), 245–265). For a brief introduction to Anna's personality, see Candal (1959), 228–240. For studies on Byzantium at the time of her husband's grandfather and during the reign of her husband, see Laiou (1972) and Bosch (1965) respectively. For a brief biographical sketch, see also Leszka–Leszka (2017), 365–371. *Cronica del Monferrato*, 1161–1176. Laiou (1972), 302.

694 *Fatouros, Kantakouzenos* I, 269, n. 258. Even though Byzantine sources speak of her as if she were the only unmarried half sister of Count Edward (who had taken over the government of the county after his father's death in 1323), her sister Beatrix was also living at the Savoyard court when the Byzantine ambassadors arrived.

695 For details, see Muratore (1906), 8.

that, along with her family, she was evacuated at least once because of flooding.[696] In 1322, her father attempted to change the anti-French policy of his house and took the sixteen-year-old Johanna to Paris for the bride show of King Charles IV. The trip proved a disappointment, for the king preferred another candidate, Marie of Luxembourg.[697] Johanna returned to Savoy only to discover that her troubles were just beginning. The following year, her beloved father died, and her mother decided to return to her family in Brabant to make way for the new mistress of the Savoyard court, Blanche of Bourgogne, the bride of Maria's stepson, Edward V of Savoy.[698]

Little is known about Johanna's education; however, considering her family's interest in learning, it is probable that she profited from the opportunities available to her. She must have met men like Elijah the Jew and Jacob of Florence, important doctors and scholars connected with the court of her father. It is even possible that she received some basic instruction from the Franciscans settled in Chambéry. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that she acquired the skills ladies in her position were expected to possess (dancing, music, and embroidery) as well as a knowledge of Latin. She may even have participated in recitals of literature and music, a popular pastime of aristocratic families of her day.[699]

Johanna's fortunes changed markedly when the Byzantine ambassadors, *parakoimomenos* Andronikos Tornikes and General (*epi tou stratou*) John de Gibelet, arrived at the border of Savoy in July 1325.[700] After local noblemen had provided a proper escort to Edward's court, Johanna's half brother received the men with great honor and gave their proposal precedence over that of the French king, Charles IV (now a widower after the death of Marie of Luxembourg in March 1324[701]). According to the Byzantine historian Kantakouzenos, Edward's decision was "due to the great prestige" that Byzantium enjoyed in the West.[702] In reality, the count's objectives remain unknown. An empress was certainly a more illustrious figure than a mere queen, but a marriage to an Orthodox prince was certain to aggravate the pope. On September 22, 1325, Edward made up his mind as to which monarch he wanted for a brother-in-law, and the two parties reached an agreement. The ambassadors then returned to Constantinople to inform their masters of the success of their mission, and the Savoyard count began preparing a

696 Origone (1999), 23. Muratore (1906), 7.

697 Sister of the Bohemian king, John of Luxembourg. The wedding took place on August 24, 1322. Bosch (1965), 106.

698 Origone (1999), 27.

699 For details, see Origone (1999), 25 f. Muratore (1906), 8–9.

700 For further literature, see *Dölger, Regesten* IV, 103, n. 2533. The Byzantine embassy arrived at the court of Savoy in Chambéry at the beginning of September 1325.

701 *Conti Chiaveria di Torino*, rotolo IX. I did not have access to this source. For extensive quotations from the Latin sources, see the footnotes in Muratore (1906), 30 ff.

702 *Kantakouzenos* I, 195 f. (I,40).

splendid dowry for Johanna, one that would be sure to impress Edward's imperial in-laws.[703]

Illness

The princess arrived in Constantinople[704] (via Savona[705]) in February 1326, accompanied by a large suite of knights and noblemen,[706] whose splendor allegedly outshone that of the retinues of previous imperial brides.[707] She was welcomed by the emperors, Andronikos II and Andronikos III (her fiancé), with customary magnificence.[708] Nevertheless, the mid-winter journey had been a demanding one, and Johanna fell ill several days after her arrival. She seems to have been rather delicate, for in later years she repeatedly suffered spells of ill health.[709] The wedding was postponed, and the young Andronikos departed for Thessaly, where he remained until the end of the summer. Besides needing to attend to his duties there, he may have wished to avoid the risk of becoming a widower again without acquiring an heir to the throne since third marriages were only sanctioned by the Orthodox Church in exceptional cases. Fortunately, Johanna's health improved, and by the beginning of autumn her recovery was beyond doubt. Andronikos III was summoned to the capital, and the court began to prepare for the wedding.

Jealousy, mistrust or gratefulness? The empress and the Kantakouzenos family

Before her marriage, Johanna had to convert to Orthodoxy. In so doing, she promised to bring up her children according to the Eastern rite[710] and received the name

703 *Dölger, Regesten* IV, 103 f, n. 2533. Laiou (1972), 303. The dowry, the gifts for the emperors, and Anna's entourage are all described in great detail by Malamut (Malamut (2014A), 87) and Origone (Origone (1999), 39).
704 Anna's arrival is only mentioned in passing by Gregoras (*Gregoras* I, 383 (VIII,15)). Sandra Origone dedicated a chapter in her monograph to a description of Constantinople in Anna's time, see Origone (1999), 153–158.
705 For a detailed itinerary of her voyage, see Muratore (1906), 41–52.
706 For a list of Anna's servants and companions, see Origone (1999), 40.
707 *Kantakouzenos* I, 204 f. (I,42). Kantakouzenos uses the name 'Anna' on the occasion of the future empress's arrival in Byzantium. Gregoras, on the other hand, only notes the appearance of the new empress and mentions that she came from Lombardy and was renamed Anna (*Gregoras* I, 384 (VIII,15)). Origone (1999), 41.
708 For information on society and ritual in Anna's time, see Origone (1999), 159–178. Muratore (1906), 53 f. For the chronology of Anna's marriage, see *Van Dieten* II/1, 186.
709 *Gregoras* II, 599 (XXII,8). Nicol (1996), 83. Malamut (2014A), 88. Muratore (1906), 55.
710 *Syntagma*, 1175–1180.

Anna. In October 1326, the young couple was married in Hagia Sophia.[711] It was a festive occasion. As the groom had been crowned a year earlier, the wedding was not followed by a coronation of the imperial couple; like other emperors in similar situations, Andronikos himself placed the diadem on the head of his bride during a ceremony following the wedding.[712]

Later records document the clothing Anna chose for special occasions. In the portrait preserved in the *Stuttgart Codex historicus* 2° 601 (see Ill. 7), the empress is shown wearing a wide-sleeved, purple a cloak or upper garment (*himation*) along with a gold-embroidered narrow, decorated scarf (*loros*) embellished with red and blue gems. She also has a high, pinnacled crown and a scepter (*baion*) likewise decorated with precious stones.[713] She must have been similarly attired when she sat on the throne in Hagia Sophia on the day of her wedding and coronation. After the wedding, most of Anna's Savoyard suite left Byzantium although several trusted personal attendants remained, including her closest companion, the intelligent and learned Isabella de la Rochette. Later, knights arrived at the Byzantine court from the West, having heard of Andronikos's fondness for tournaments and knightly contests, and were heartily welcomed by the young emperor.[714]

The young couple did not remain in Constantinople long but soon departed for Didymoteichon, perhaps in an attempt to avoid conflict with the senior emperor.[715] On the way, they received news of a Turkish offensive, and Andronikos rushed off to engage the enemy along with his soldiers and officials.[716] Though the chronicle does not specifically mention her, Anna apparently remained in Didymoteichon, the home of the Kantakouzenos family, throughout the final phase of the First Civil War.[717] Andronikos's choice for a refuge for his young wife was certainly not without design. He would have been counting on Theodora and Eirene, John's mother and wife respectively, to help Anna adjust to life in Byzantium and learn the language and customs as well as the court ceremonial. During these years, Anna became well acquainted with the family of her future adversary. Unfortunately, the sources do not report on the early relationship of these three women, who had yet to play a crucial role in the political and religious events of their day.

The first years of her marriage would have offered Anna ample opportunity to recognize the close relationship that existed between her husband and John

711 *Kantakouzenos* I, 204 f. (I,42). Muratore (1906), 56. Nicol (1972B), 166.
712 *Kantakouzenos* I, 204 f. (I,42). *Gregoras* I, 383 (VIII,15). Origone (1999), 46. For further details, see Meyendorff (1990). Yannopoulos (1991).
713 Spatharakis (1976), 237. For a discussion of the empress's identity, see also 238 f. For a reproduction of the image, see *ibid*., ill. 181.
714 *Kantakouzenos* I, 205 (I,42).
715 *Kantakouzenos* I, 206 (I,42). Malamut (2014A), 90. For a description of Anna's life in Didymoteichon, see Origone (1999), 51–57. Nicol (1996A), 30.
716 *Kantakouzenos* I, 206 f. (I,42). Nicol (1968), 39.
717 *Kantakouzenos* I, 260 (I,52).



Ill. 7: *Anna Palaiologina (Anna of Savoy). Stuttgart Codex historicus 2° 601, Württembergische Landesbibliothek*

Kantakouzenos, who was a regular visitor to the imperial household. In 1328, Andronikos made his friend and co-worker the general of the imperial armies (*megas domestikos*) and so acknowledged John's many years of faithful service. In his historical works, Kantakouzenos describes his duties and the privileges which made him almost equal to the emperor himself. Andronikos apparently encouraged the distinction of his friend and allegedly planned to make him co-emperor (an honor which Kantakouzenos claims to have repeatedly

refused).[718] It is interesting that Nikephoros Gregoras accused Anna of being jealous of John and his wife.[719] Indeed, the empress may have felt neglected since her husband spent so much time with Kantakouzenos, but it is also possible that she simply recognized the man's talent and ambition and perceived him as a potential threat.

After seven long years, the civil war between grandfather and grandson finally ended, a circumstance which had little immediate effect on Anna's life. On May 23, 1328, when Andronikos III entered Constantinople and his grandfather abdicated, Anna did not immediately join her husband in the capital. Apparently, she had come to like Didymoteichon, which with its forests and hills on the horizon, may have reminded her of Savoy. It was close enough for the emperor to visit regularly and provided a base of operations whenever imperial duties or conflicts called him to Thrace.[720] In the course of his campaign in Asia Minor, sometime around 1334, Andronikos III decided to send the (Byzantine) women living in Edessa to Didymoteichon.[721] While the sources do not mention them again, it is quite probable that Anna was in charge of this refugee camp in her husband's absence.

Caught between the pope and the emperor

As was often the case with Western brides, Anna's marriage to the Byzantine emperor was not to the liking of the pope, who had protested from the beginning against the engagement of a Catholic noblewoman to a heretic prince.[722] Nevertheless, as her half brother had suggested in his defense to the Holy See, Anna would have an opportunity to win her spouse as a convert to Catholicism, thereby taking another step toward the healing of the schism between the two churches.[723]

While the sources do not offer any information on how serious Anna was about matters of faith or whether she had any intention of becoming engaged in the Unionist debate (certainly an unpopular topic in Byzantium), there is no doubt that she came to Byzantium well prepared for her 'mission.' There were several Franciscan monks (led by Garcias Arnaldi Aquitanicus) in her Italian suite, and it was these men who were allegedly responsible for Andronikos III's conversion

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718 *Kantakouzenos* I, 365, 369 f. (II,9).

719 *Gregoras* II, 761 (XV,4).

720 The emperor repeatedly visited the empress in Didymoteichon. For details, see *Kantakouzenos* I, 324 (II,3). *Gregoras* I, 430 (IX,8). Malamut (2014A), 91.

721 *Kantakouzenos* I, 277 (I,54).

722 Nicol (1996), 83. Laiou (1972), 304. Muratore (1906), 253 f. Malamut (2014A), 89, 93. Origone (1999), 47 f., for a detailed account of Byzantine relations with the pope and the Catholic princes, see 59–65.

723 This noble suggestion appears in the papal letter quoted in full in Muratore (1906), 33 f.

to Catholicism (before 1333).[724] Although there are reasons to doubt that such an event ever took place,[725] it is plausible that Anna (with the help of her entourage) attempted to explain the fundamentals of Catholic doctrine to her new husband in the early years of their marriage.[726] Although Andronikos may have had a military-political or even a private interest in Western theological teachings, as a realist and a politician, he must have been aware of the turmoil that his conversion would cause in Byzantium and the danger it would pose to his own position and to the continuation of his dynasty.

Pope John XXII was nevertheless persistent in his efforts to unify the two churches.[727] In 1334, he wrote to encourage Anna to bring her husband and his subjects to the Catholic faith.[728] The fact that the pontiff referred to the emperor as *vir infidelis* implies that Andronikos, if he did actually embrace Catholicism at some point, quickly abandoned his new confession.[729] Despite Anna's failure to secure a lasting conversion on the part of her husband, the Catholic Church did not sever ties with the empress as the papal correspondence noted below reveals. In June 1346, Pope Clement VI wrote to her regarding the island of Chios, which he requested as a base of operations for the planned crusade to Smyrna for a period of three years.[730] The papal legate apparently remained in the imperial city for some time, for when Kantakouzenos entered Constantinople in 1347, he found there Bartholomew of Rome, a Catholic bishop.[731]

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724 The Franciscan chronicle notes "*inter etiam fratres transmissos tunc fuit frater Garcias Arnaldi Aquitanicus de Custodia Auxitana, qui remanens Constantinopoli et adhaerens imperatrici Graecorum latinae de domo Sabaudiae (...).*" *Chronica XXIV*, 508, (Golubovich, reprint., 294). The presence of the Franciscans is evidenced by a passage in the *Memoirs* of John Kantakouzenos, where he mentions that the inhabitants of Galata sent to him two Franciscans to explain the conflict between the two confessions (*Kantakouzenos* II, 503 (III,82)). See also Bosch (1965), 192.

725 For further discussion on this point, see the argumentation of Ursula Bosch, who believes that the emperor converted secretly in order to advance his political goals. Needless to say, none of the Byzantine historians mentions a change of confession. Bosch (1965), 121 f.

726 Donald Nicol rejects the possibility that Anna made any effort to bring her husband closer to the Catholic doctrine, describing the empress as a vain woman "never given to profundities" (Nicol (1996), 83).

727 Muratore (1906), 80–87, for the Latin letter addressed by John XXII to Anna, see Muratore (1906), 83 f.

728 "*si tempus praesens attente consideres, tempus est, quo erga virum tuum populumque sibi subditum bonum valeas operari (...) salvabitur vir infidelis per mulierem fidelem* (...)." *Raynaldus, Annales*, 1334, § 3.

729 Bosch (1965), 122.

730 *Kantakouzenos* III, 13 (IV,2 f.). Setton (1976–1981), I, 205 f.

731 *Kantakouzenos* III, 12–20 (IV,2). See also Setton (1976–1981), I, 212.

Portent of death

There was nothing in the early years of Anna's marriage to indicate that she would become an important figure in Byzantine politics. Andronikos III[732] had grown into a decisive man with a good knowledge of people and solid political and military training. Even though Ursula Bosch wrote in her monograph that his reign was "history without future, a line of constant civil war, inimical attacks and courageous defensive fights,"[733] there is no denying his many successes (detailed in the historical overview).[734]

Sometime in late 1329 or early 1330, Andronikos III fell seriously ill in Didymoteichon.[735] Eager to settle his affairs and provide a protector for his heir in the event of his death (for Anna was with child at the time), the young emperor allegedly decided to make his wife regent[736] and Kantakouzenos governor of the empire. He gathered Anna, Kantakouzenos, and his court officials to his bedside, and after a brief speech, he put the hands of Kantakouzenos around those of the empress in front of an image of the Theotokos and said, "I give you this woman and all the Romans, and from this time on you will take care of her."[737] Following this scene, which is reminiscent of the crucified Christ placing his mother in the care of the Apostle John, Andronikos also had his courtiers swear obedience to his wife, his child, and the *megas domestikos*,[738] to whom he entrusted the government of the empire until the Palaiologan heir would come of age.[739]

Four years after her arrival in the empire, Anna thus faced the very real possibility of having to assume an active role in the government in order to preserve the empire for her unborn child, an eventuality for which Andronikos had apparently never prepared her. Anna herself had not shown any ambition to assume such a role until that moment. As the emperor's condition deteriorated, Kantakouzenos took steps to establish Anna as regent. He gathered the court officials once more and made them swear loyalty to her. Nevertheless, it seems that this gesture was not merely an expression of loyalty towards his friend's young wife and

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732 For a monograph on Andronikos III and his reign, see Bosch (1965). For further details on his reign, see Nicol (1972B), 159–191. Zástěrová *et al.* (1996), 307 f. For further literature on the emperor, see the footnotes in the chapter devoted to his first wife, Eirene-Adelheid.

733 Bosch (1965), ix.

734 On Andronikos's reign, see Nicol (1972B), 172–190.

735 Gregoras ascribed Andronikos's illness to the fact that he had not dressed himself properly after a bath. *Gregoras* I, 439 (IX,9). *Kantakouzenos* I, 391 (II,14). Origone (1999), 53 f. Muratore (1906), 66.

736 *Kantakouzenos* I, 396 (II,15).

737 *Kantakouzenos* I, 393 (II,14). Malamut (2014A), 91.

738 *Kantakouzenos* II, 91 (III,14).

739 See also *Gregoras* I, 440 (IX,10). For further debate, see Bosch (1965), 178 ff. Nicol (1968), 41, 44.

child. The description of the oath is immediately followed by a passage in which Kantakouzenos's mother comes to question the young emperor regarding his wishes in respect to his own mother's participation in the regency and the purported refusal on the part of Andronikos to consider Maria-Rita's involvement.[740] Given the long enmity between the Kantakouzenos family and Empress Maria-Rita, it seems obvious that the Kantakouzenes were eager for the regency to pass directly to Anna and not to the more experienced empress, who would most certainly have taken steps to exclude them from the government.

Time proved that the illness was not terminal, for Andronikos made a miraculous recovery[741] and lived for another eleven years. Though the sources remain silent on the matter, Anna's situation likely changed after this crisis. She was no longer merely the wife of the emperor and, as such, responsible for providing an heir to the throne, performing ceremonial duties, and overseeing the imperial household. From 1330 onwards, she was also an emerging political figure who would ultimately control the fate of the empire should something happen to her husband – at least until a future male heir or her daughter Eirene (born in the spring of 1330) reached maturity. The fact that the empress did indeed assume a more active role in imperial politics after the emperor's illness is demonstrated by the fact that Andronikos entrusted to her the government of the capital (which she ruled with the support of the patriarch) during his sojourn in Thessaly in 1334.[742] He did the same in May 1335 when he left Constantinople to protect the Byzantine islands against the Hospitallers, the Genoese, and the Venetians. Gregoras noted that Anna did not approve of Andronikos's decision to take charge of the imperial fleet (allegedly because the task was not worthy of an emperor),[743] which also indicates her nascent involvement in the political affairs of the empire. Around this same time, some young noblemen who were opposed to Andronikos attempted to make use of his absence from the capital. With the help of the Genoese, they made plans to take the city and kill their political adversaries, including the empress and her children. Together with Theodora Kantakouzene, who had been responsible for her training,[744] Anna was able to defend Constantinople until Andronikos could return and restore order.[745] The empress apparently participated in the tribunal that was called to judge the conspirators.[746] The increased significance of the empress as a political figure is also reflected in her appearance on coins featuring Andronikos III on the recto and Anna and her son John on the verso.[747]

740 *Kantakouzenos* I, 396 (II,15); III, 91 (IV,14). See also Bosch (1965), 180. Origone (1999), 55. Kyrris (1982), 468.
741 *Kantakouzenos* I, 409 ff. (II,17). *Gregoras* I, 442 (IX,10).
742 Bosch (1965), 134. Origone (1999), 67.
743 *Gregoras* I, 525 (XI,1).
744 *Gregoras* I, 530 (XI,2). Kyrris (1982), 468.
745 *Kantakouzenos* I, 483 f. (II,30). *Gregoras* I, 530 ff. (XI,2).
746 *Gregoras* I, 530–533 (XI,2). Origone (1999), 68. Muratore (1906), 91 f. Kyrris (1982), 468.
747 Bertelè (1937), 59 f.

Anna's family

In 1330 Anna had failed to provide her husband with the hoped-for male heir, instead giving birth to a daughter, who was christened Eirene.[748] Motivated by the emperor's recent illness, the imperial couple would have been anxious to produce a son, for only a male heir could guarantee the continuation of the dynasty and secure the position of the dowager empress and her daughter. While Eirene would certainly have had a claim to the throne, the government could also pass to the next male prince in line, Constantine Porphyrogennetos, the uncle of the emperor.[749] When Andronikos had recovered from his illness, the empress became pregnant again and gave birth to a boy in Didymoteichon on June 18, 1332.[750] The child was baptized 'John'[751] and not 'Michael' after his paternal grandfather (as was customary for the firstborn son of an emperor). This break with tradition may have been related to the ardent friendship between the child's father and John Kantakouzenos.[752] Andronikos was not in Didymoteichon for his son's birth. On learning of his heir, he laid aside the mourning garments he had donned out of respect for his paternal grandfather, who had died several months earlier, and organized two tournaments to celebrate the arrival of his son.[753]

In the years that followed, the couple had three more children:[754] Despot Michael (*1337),[755] Theodore,[756] and Princess Maria, who later married Francesco

748 *PLP*, n. 91851. *Kantakouzenos* I, 394 (II,14) Kantakouzenos confuses the elder princess, Eirene, with her younger sister, Maria, who became the wife of Francesco I Gattilusio (*Kantakouzenos* I, 508 f. (II,34)). Gregoras (*Gregoras* I, 546 (XI,7)), on the other hand, mentions her as a daughter of Andronikos without giving her a name. Papadopoulos (1938), n. 77. Nicol wrongly places her birth to 1327 (Nicol (1996), 84).

749 As Lynda Garland suggested in our correspondence, Constantine's imprisonment, officially connected with his ill treatment of Empress Maria-Rita of Armenia, was actually part of Andronikos III's strategy to prevent his uncle from claiming the throne if Andronikos did not produce a male heir.

750 *Gregoras* I, 482 (X,3). Muratore (1906), 70.

751 For a recent biography of the emperor, see Radić (2008).

752 This uncommon choice may also be taken as evidence that 'Michael' was the name of Andronikos's firstborn from his marriage to Eirene- Adelheid of Braunschweig-Grubenhagen.

753 *Gregoras* I, 482 f. (X,3). It is interesting that Kantakouzenos does not mention the heir to the throne until the death of his father, Andronikos III (*Kantakouzenos* II, 18 (III,2)). Origone (1999), 56 f.

754 Van Dieten claims that Andronikos and Anna had six children (*Van Dieten* II/1, 187, n. 184). I was not able to arrive at this number except by adding Andronikos's illegitimate daughter, Eirene, who married into Trebizond, to his offspring by Anna.

755 *Gregoras* II, 576 (XII,2). *PLP*, n. 21521.

756 Origone (1999), 69. *PLP*, n. 21461, later governor of Lemnos.

I Gattilusio, the Lord of Lesbos.[757] Besides his children by Anna, Andronikos also had two illegitimate daughters: Eirene married the emperor of Trebizond in 1335[758] while Eudokia became the wife of the Mongol ruler Uzbeg.[759] In 1339, Andronikos and Anna's elder daughter, Eirene, who was only nine years old at the time, was married to the Bulgarian co-regent, Michael Asen.[760] Anna accompanied her husband and daughter to the ceremony in Adrianople.[761]

The Hodegon drama

In June 1341, the emperor again became ill. After presiding over a synod (convened to establish the Palamite doctrine as Orthodox), his condition deteriorated rapidly. Convinced that death was imminent, he asked to be taken to the Hodegon Monastery[762] to pray. There, he would either experience a miracle and be cured or prepare himself for the end of his earthly life. The empress and her two oldest sons arrived at the monastery the day before the emperor's death.[763] Kantakouzenos informs us that she lamented 'out of proportion' her husband's condition and her own bitter situation,[764] but his criticism may have been misplaced. Despite Andronikos's earlier health crisis, or perhaps because of it, Anna must have feared her husband's death both for personal reasons and for the political ramifications

757 *PLP*, n. 16888, Surprisingly, she is not mentioned in the *PLP* as the daughter of Anna Palaiologina (see n. 21347). There is no indication as to when the princess was born. The date *ante quem* is thus the date of her father's death, June 14–15, 1341 (as the sources do not mention Anna giving birth to a child around the time of or after her husband's death).

758 *Lampros, Panaretos*, 271. *Gregoras* I, 536 (XI,3) (calls her Eudokia). See also Bosch (1965), 150 f. Based on the year of her marriage, we may assume that Eudokia was born around 1323, possibly while Andronikos's first wife, Eirene-Adelheid, was still alive or during his brief bereavement (1324–1326).

759 For details on this princess, see *PLP*, n. 21437. Gregoras mentioned the name Eudokia (*Gregoras* I, 536 (XI,3)) but, according to Papadopoulos (Papadopoulos (1938), 50, fn. 47), confused the two illegitimate daughters of Andronikos III.

760 *Kantakouzenos* I, 504 f. (II,33), 508 f. (II,34) (Kantakouzenos calls the princess Maria). Bosch (1965), 81.

761 *Kantakouzenos* I, 504–509 (II,34). For details, see Malamut (2014A), 95.

762 *Gregoras* I, 559–560 (XI,11). *Kantakouzenos* I, 557 (II,40). Malamut (2014A), 95 f. Muratore (1906), 104 f. Nicol (1996), 85 f. There was a strong connection between the Komnenian and Palaiologan courts and the Hodegon icon known as the Hodegetria. In late Byzantium, the icon was brought to the imperial palace during important feasts. For details on the icon and its connection with emperors, see Weyl Carr (1997), especially 95 ff.

763 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 81, n. 32.

764 Gregoras notes that on the third day, the emperor awakened briefly from his deep sleep and bade the empress not to cry (*Gregoras* I, 560 (XI,11)).

it would bring. If Andronikos died, necessity would demand that she assume the government of a foreign country and bear responsibility for the succession of her nine-year-old son. In the 1330s, she had encountered fierce opposition from the nobility and would certainly not have forgotten the plot to murder her and her son. After the death (1334/1335) of her husband's uncle, Constantine Palaiologos, the next in line to the throne after her sons John and Michael was Constantine's younger brother, Demetrios Palaiologos, who had also joined in the revolt against her husband. When Andronikos crushed the rebellion of the nobility, Demetrios had been forced to flee and was only able to return to Byzantium thanks to the intervention of his sister Simonis.

Anna's fears became reality on the night of June 14–15, 1341, when all of the doctors' efforts proved useless and Andronikos died at the age of forty-four, ostensibly leaving the *megas domestikos* in charge of the empire.[765] The empress spent the first three days of her widowhood in mourning at the monastery[766] along with her children. It was Kantakouzenos who came to reason with her and moved her sons to the imperial palace, where he provided a guard of five hundred men in case one of Andronikos's opponents should attempt to seize the throne.[767] Besides bringing the young princes to safety, Kantakouzenos immediately set out to secure the provinces, dispatching instructions to local governors in order to prevent chaos.[768] While such measures were certainly called for, Anna may have felt slighted. Her insecurity and mistrust increased when Alexios Apokaukos, Kantakouzenos's former protégé, came to the Hodegon Monastery to inform her that the *megas domestikos* was planning a *coup d'état* and intended to murder her sons. As Apokaukos had belonged to Kantakouzenos's inner circle, Anna had every reason to believe him. Instead of completing the mourning period at her husband's tomb, she returned immediately to the palace (June 18).[769] In the space of just one week, the walls of the Hodegon had witnessed a series of devastating blows to the future peace and security of the empire: as the emperor relinquished his earthly throne forever, doubt and fear were sown in the heart of the empress against the man whom her husband had wished to be her closest advisor, and the collaboration of the empress and the *megas domestikos* in governing the empire seemed doomed to failure before it ever began.

765 *Kantakouzenos* I, 560 (II,40). *Gregoras* I, 559 f. (XI,11) *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 81, n. 32. See also Origone (1999), 69 f., 74 f. For details on the rituals surrounding the death of the emperor, see Karlin-Hayter (1991).

766 *Kantakouzenos* II, 14 (III,1).

767 *Kantakouzenos* I, 559 f. (II,40). *Gregoras* II, 576 f. (XII,2).

768 *Kantakouzenos* I, 559 f. (II,40), II, 14 f. (III,1). Origone (1999),72 f.

769 Gregoras mentions it was the third day of mourning. *Gregoras* I, 560 (XI,11); II, 578 ff. (XII,2). *Kantakouzenos* I, 559 f. (II,40); II, 14 (III,1). Malamut (2014A), 96 f. Bosch (1965), 192.

Advisors or supervisors? (1341–1344)[770]

When Andronikos died, the empress remained the only crowned member of the imperial family and, as regent for her nine-year-old son, the ultimate representative of the Byzantine state.[771] It was she who received foreign embassies,[772] minted coins with her image,[773] and nominated important court officials.[774] Nevertheless, how much real power she wielded remains unclear. From the outset of her reign, Anna was surrounded by strong men with private agendas. Ursula Bosch, reflecting Anna's distrust of the man, describes Kantakouzenos as one "who would rather risk the crisis of the state and the fall of the empire, which he pretended to serve, than allow the hierarchical progress of his opponents, diminishing his landed property, and the influence of his family."[775] Patriarch John XIV Kalekas,[776] whom Andronikos III had repeatedly entrusted with the protection of his wife and children in his absence,[777] was also eager to participate in the government, and it was his competition with Kantakouzenos that paved the way to the Second Civil War.[778] He gradually acquired a great deal of influence over political matters and used his power to satisfy his cravings for luxury and distinction, wearing red shoes and moving into the imperial palace.[779] Finally, Alexios

770 Nicol (1996), 85–87. Origone (1999), 77–86. On the official position of Byzantine empresses, see Maslev (1966). Missiou (1982). For a good introduction to the events of the Second Civil War, see Origone (1999), 87–101 and Gill (1985A). For a summary of the Second Civil War, see Gill (1985), 45 ff.

771 Malamut (2014A), 101. On Anna's position as regent, see also Christofilopoulou (1970), 129 ff.

772 For example, she received the Bulgarian ambassadors, who had arrived in Constantinople in June 1341, demanding the extradition of Tsar Michael Šišman. Following a *coup d'état*, Šišman had found refuge in Byzantium along with his Byzantine wife and children. Consequently, Anna gathered the senate, the patriarch, and the *megas domestikos* to discuss the request of the Bulgarian tsar. *Kantakouzenos* II, 19–25 (III,2).

773 On some coins, John V, crowned by Christ, is pictured on the recto and Anna, crowned by the Virgin, appears on the verso. During her time in Thessalonike, Anna and her son apparently minted a silver coin (*basilikon*) with (on the recto) Anna on the left and John on the right, the empress occupying the more prestigious place. Nicol–Bendall (1977), 95. Malamut (2014A), 102. For further details on Anna's appearance on coins, see Dölger (1938) and Bertelè (1978), 21, n. 1. For further literature, see *PLP*, n. 21347.

774 *Kantakouzenos* II, 98–100 (III,15). Malamut (2014A), 103.

775 Bosch (1965), 164. See also Origone (1999), 87 ff. Nicol (1996A), 47, 53.

776 For a brief introduction, see Origone (1999), 90.

777 *Gregoras* I, 496 (X,7); II, 579–584 (XII,3).

778 For a detailed analysis of the situation after the death of Andronikos III, see Malamut (2014A), 98 f. For a good overview of the Second Civil War, see Nicol (1972B), 191–216.

779 *Gregoras* II, 697 f. (XIV,3). On the patriarch's corruption, see *Gregoras* II, 700 f. (XIV,3).

Apokaukos,[780] a man of low birth and morals but great ambition and intelligence, also penetrated the empress's inner circle and began to turn Anna against his former benefactor.[781]

The empress was soon caught in a net of intrigue created by Kalekas and Apokaukos.[782] The *megas domestikos* may have sensed the empress's mistrust, and to prove that he was not plotting against her or her children, he left the palace. Preparations for war with Bulgaria forced him to leave the capital soon afterwards.[783] His departure was mistimed as it gave his enemies a free hand to further feed Anna's anxiety. At the end of the summer of 1341, the empress fell ill. Apokaukos used the opportunity to take John V to Epibatai, where he attempted to marry him to his daughter and, via this union, take control of the government.[784] The empress managed to prevent the wedding but then decided to forgive (or was persuaded to forgive) Apokaukos, who had already made himself indispensable to her as a general able to counter Kantakouzenos. Gregoras describes how Apokaukos used corruption, flattery, and threats to gradually concentrate power into his own hands.[785]

In late August 1341, Anna summoned Kantakouzenos back to the capital from Didymoteichon.[786] However, as she allowed herself to be influenced by Kalekas and Apokaukos regarding the "untrustworthy" nature of the *megas domestikos*, reconciliation was impossible. Kantakouzenos left the capital well aware of the seriousness of his position. Anxious to protect his family and possessions, not to mention his standing within the empire, he had himself proclaimed emperor two months later.[787] To demonstrate that his action was not directed against the Palaiologan dynasty, he ordered the names of Anna and John to remain in all imperial commemorations and to precede his name and that of his wife.[788] Even though Kantakouzenos was not guided solely by his ambition in his decision to assume the imperial title, his actions confirmed the hostile image that Anna's advisors had painted.

780 For Kantakouzenos's description of the origin and deeds of Apokaukos, see *Kantakouzenos* II, 278 f. (III,46). Origone (1999), 91.

781 *Gregoras* II, 578 (XII,2).

782 *Gregoras* II, 584 (XII,4). Elisabeth Malamut argued persuasively that Anna must have resented Kantakouzenos's taking over the imperial prerogatives (Malamut (2014A), 104). According to Origone, Anna was persuaded to distrust Kantakouzenos through calumny. Origone (1999), 95. Nicol (1968), 47–49.

783 *Kantakouzenos* II, 57 f. (III,7). Malamut (2014A), 99.

784 *Gregoras* II, 599 f. (XII,8). *Kantakouzenos* II, 70 f. (III,10). Malamut (2014A), 99 f. Muratore (1906), 120. Nicol (1996A), 51.

785 *Gregoras* II, 607 (XII,10).

786 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 81, n. 34.

787 Origone (1999), 97 f. Muratore (1906), 130 f.

788 *Gregoras* II, 643 (XIII,3).

Based on the testimony of Gregoras, contested in some respects by Van Dieten,[789] Kantakouzenos sent an embassy to Anna before proclaiming himself emperor, reminding her of the orders of her late husband and of the agreements that had been made and confirmed by oaths shortly after Andronikos's death. The legates were captured and imprisoned by Apokaukos's men,[790] and although the empress soon rectified the situation, she was neither willing nor able to negotiate. Shortly thereafter, she ordered Kantakouzenos to remain in Didymoteichon until she had decided his fate.[791]

Kantakouzenos's resolve to proclaim himself emperor snapped the final thread of trust between the empress and the *megas domestikos*.[792] The patriarch excommunicated Kantakouzenos[793] and immediately crowned the young John Palaiologos in Hagia Sophia on November 19, 1341.[794] Anna had originally wished to postpone the coronation in order to protect her son as she knew that once he had been crowned and most of the imperial power had passed to him, John could easily become a tool in the hands of ambitious noblemen. A proclaimed pretender, who was backed by a large support group of relatives and friends (not to mention the army), had altered the situation. Under these circumstances, it became imperative for John V to take hold of his inheritance. New coins with John V, crowned by Christ, on the recto and Anna, crowned by the Virgin, on the verso were minted to commemorate the coronation.[795]

Although his crown brought the nine-year-old emperor no real authority, the name of John V appeared on all imperial orders following the coronation.[796] In this way, Anna could acknowledge that the imperial dignity had passed to her son[797] while remaining heavily involved in affairs of state. The support of General Apokaukos and Patriarch Kalekas, which Anna must have welcomed at the outset of her reign, gradually evolved into a sort of supervision. Kantakouzenos reports that the two men requested that the empress not make any independent decisions, and they ensured that she did not receive any embassies on her own.[798] The same

789 *Van Dieten* III, 263, n. 89.
790 *Kantakouzenos* II, 141 f. (III,23).
791 *Kantakouzenos* II, 144 f. (III,24). *Gregoras* II, 609 (XII,11).
792 On the nature of Kantakouzenos's alleged usurpation, see Melichar (2017B).
793 *Kantakouzenos* II, 190 (III,30), 218 (III,36). *Gregoras* II, 616 (XII,13).
794 *Gregoras* II, 616 (XII,13). *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 64, n. 9. *Kantakouzenos* II, 218 (III,36). Throughout the regency, John appears on coins together with his mother. For details and images, see Sear (1974), 396–398. Malamut (2014A), 105. Muratore (1906), 132.
795 Origone (1999), 99.
796 This circumstance is emphasized and plausibly argued by Maslev (1966), 331.
797 Malamut (2014A), 106.
798 *Kantakouzenos* II, 203 f. (III,33), 210 f. (III,34). As Elisabeth Malamut has noted, Kantakouzenos continued to send embassies to the empress with the intent of separating her from her advisors. Apokaukos and Kalekas understood his motives all too

historian reports that Apokaukos and Kalekas had Anna watched day and night by their accomplices.[799] The patriarch installed himself in the palace and made Anna swear, under anathema, that she would consult him on all matters of state. For these reasons, it is difficult to judge how much responsibility Anna bore for the political events of the first four years of the civil war.

To protect her son's claim to the throne, Anna and her advisors began to consolidate their support networks. In the first place, they sought to win over important noblemen who might be tempted to side with their opponents. Among these were the brothers of John Kantakouzenos's wife, John and Manuel Asen, and their father, Andronikos. Those who did not accept an alliance were generally imprisoned, including the elderly Theodora Kantakouzene,[800] Anna's former supporter, who was held in appalling conditions and died, deprived of medical care, in January 1342.[801]

In September 1341, Anna concluded a new treaty with Genoa, and in March 1342, she renewed a treaty with Venice.[802] Her armies then besieged the Kantakouzenos base in Didymoteichon, which was being defended by Eirene Kantakouzene.[803] In the meantime, Kantakouzenos (who had fled to Serbia) made a treaty with the Serbian tsar, Stephan Uroš IV Dušan. One of the treaty's stipulations was the tsar's promise of enmity toward the empress and her son.[804] Anna soon learned about the agreement and sent two embassies to the Serbian court, requesting that the *megas domestikos* be handed over to her or that the tsar imprison him immediately in return for a number of cities in Thrace. According to Kantakouzenos, the tsar angrily refused Anna's proposals.[805] He may have believed that by promoting civil war in Byzantium, he could ease his own path to the Byzantine throne. In a final attempt at persuasion, Anna sent one of her Western knights, Giovanni di Orlay, to the senators of Venice, who were to convince the Serbian *kral* not to support her opponent.[806] These diplomatic missions bore little fruit, however.

In order to secure funds for war, Anna decided to borrow the substantial sum of 30,000 ducats from the Republic of Venice in 1343.[807] Mindful of the empress's economic situation, the senate of the maritime republic demanded collateral, and

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well and were sure to be present during these audiences. For details, see Malamut (2014A), 107.

799 *Kantakouzenos* II, 208 (III,34).

800 *Kantakouzenos* II, 219 f. (III,36). Bosch (1965), 187.

801 *Kantakouzenos* II, 220–223 (III,36). *Gregoras* II, 618 f. (XII,13). For Anna's embassies to the Serbian kral, see Origone (1999), 107.

802 *Dölger, Regesten* V, ns. 2864, 2876. *Thiriet, Régestes*, I, n. 152. *Diplomatarium* I, n. 132, 257–259. Muratore (1906), 119 f., 139.

803 *Kantakouzenos* II, 337 (III,56). Malamut (2014A), 107 ff.

804 *Kantakouzenos* II, 273 (III,45).

805 *Kantakouzenos* II, 305 f. (III,52). *Dölger, Regesten* V, ns. 2879–2881. Nicol (1968), 52.

806 *Dölger, Regesten* V, n. 2888.

807 For details, see Barker (1969), 443 ff.

Anna was forced to pawn the crown jewels[808] and pledge to repay the loan within three years at five percent interest. The debt was never fully paid, and the jewels were not returned to the Byzantine capital, which increased the bitterness that already existed between Byzantium and Venice.[809]

Anna and her advisors were eager to find new supporters to bolster their position. To this end, they attempted to win over Sultan Orhan.[810] In the summer of 1343, they also sent an embassy, headed by a Savoyard nobleman named Philippe de Saint-Germain, to Pope Clement VI to request his aid. In one letter, summarized by Kantakouzenos, Anna reminded the pope of her Western descent and her faithfulness to the Catholic Church and promised, in return for assistance against Kantakouzenos, the conversions of her son, Patriarch Kalekas, General Apokaukos, and (most curiously) the monks of Athos, along with her other subjects.[811] In view of the extraordinary nature of this proposal, it is not surprising that Kantakouzenos considered Alexios Apokaukos the author of the letter. The latter's perceived intent was to discredit Anna in the eyes of the Byzantine people and claim the throne if an opportunity presented itself.[812]

The rich numismatic evidence from the period of Anna's regency indicates how her party used coins as propaganda for their cause. Shortly after the emperor's death, the coins minted in Constantinople show John and Anna on the recto and the enthroned Christ or the Virgin and St. Demetrios on the verso (1341–1347). Anna is mostly depicted carrying a scepter while John holds a cross.[813] The more valuable *basilikon* (silver coin), used mostly by the wealthy and the aristocracy,

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808 For an intriguing study on the appearance of the late Byzantine coronation jewels, see Hetherington (2003), especially p. 161. Among others, Hetherington gives a description of these jewels, which allegedly came from the crown of Andronikos III and consisted mostly of balas rubies (spinel), rubies, sapphires, and pearls. According to Muratore, these were crown jewels of great value but not necessarily the coronation jewels (Muratore (1906), 155.)

809 *Dölger, Regesten* IV, n. 2791. Nicol (1988), 259 f. Malamut (2014A), 110. Hetherington (Hetherington (2003), 157 f.) claims that the jewels were taken to the East on at least three occasions, but as the negotiations did not achieve their aim, the jewels were always returned to Venice. Hetherington further suggests that the Byzantines only pawned the stones detached from the crown (see p. 161). As the interest mounted, the stones finally became the possession of the bankers and were most probably sold on the open market, losing their identity in the process. Muratore (1906), 152–155.

810 *Doukas*, 55 (VIII,1).

811 *Clement VI, Letters* I, ns. 466–471 (all dated October 21, 1343). The original letter has been lost, and its contents can only be inferred from the pope's reply.

812 *Kantakouzenos* II, 539–541 (III,87). Nicol (1996), 88 f. For further details, see Malamut (2014A), 110.

813 For a detailed study of the coins, their images and interpretations, see Bertelè (1937). On coins featuring Andronikos III, see also Gerasimov (1978), 136 and Gerasimov (1966).

bears the figures of Anna and John on the obverse and the seated Christ with the Gospels[814] or the Virgin, St. Demetrios, and St. George on the reverse.[815] Another type of coin bears the image of John V kneeling before the seated Christ on the obverse and Anna standing to the left of the seated Virgin on the reverse.[816] A *stamenon* (a coin commonly used by a broader segment of the population) from 1341 shows Anna and John flanking a cross on the obverse and St. Demetrios on the reverse.[817] By associating herself with the holy images of Christ and his mother, the empress underscored the legitimacy of her claims to the imperial throne and highlighted the divine protection she enjoyed. The selection of St. Demetrios and St. George linked Anna and John with powerful military heroes, desirable allies in a period of civil war.

In the course of her regency, Anna must have had frequent opportunities to use her seal, which has come down to the present time in several examples. They all depict the empress standing and holding a *baion*, wearing a high, pinnacled crown with *pendilia,* and dressed in a *himation.* The image is accompanied by the inscription "Anna, the most venerable *augousta autokratorissa* of the Romans, Palaiologina" while the reverse bears the image of an enthroned Theotokos with a medallion of Christ.[818] The identity of the empress on the seal is sometimes questioned; however, as Anna of Hungary did not live to see her husband become a sovereign ruler[819] and Anna of Moscow, the wife of John VIII, was never crowned and died three years after her marriage, neither of them would have been likely to use the title *autokratorissa.* There remains little doubt that the empress on these seals is indeed the consort of Andronikos III.

The changing tide (1344–1346)

As the war continued and resources became scarce, Anna was forced to make several decisions that made her very unpopular with the Byzantine people. According

814 Bendall–Donald (1979), 132–135, ns. 1–5.
815 Bendall–Donald (1979), 136 f., ns. 6–7.
816 Bendall–Donald (1979), 138 f., n. 8.
817 Bendall–Donald (1979), 246 f., n. 1. For further literature on Anna and coinage, see *Goodacre, Handbook*, 336. Bendall–Donald (1980), 47. Protonotarios (1977), 77–86. Longuet (1933), 143 f. Goodacre (1935), 232–240. Gerasimov (1967), 188. Veglery (1970), 486 f.
818 Schlumberger (1900), 180. Thomasso Bertelè describes two similar seals reputed to have belonged to an Anna Palaiologina, one from a private collection and one preserved in the Museum in Plovdiv (See Bertelè (1937), 67–69, see also the image on p. 69. A similar image and inscription, this time on a lead seal, is reported by Zacos and Veglery (Zacos–Veglery (1972), I, 124, n. 127.)
819 The first co-emperor who was able to use the title *autokrator* was, in fact, the son of Anna of Hungary, Michael IX (1294–1320). For full argumentation, see Spatharakis (1976), 238 f.

to Gregoras, she had the sacred icons in Hagia Sophia stripped of their gold, silver, and precious stones. Moreover, she confiscated the possessions of the wealthy, quite possibly on fabricated charges, causing the unfortunates to flee to the asylum of Hagia Sophia. The empress, however, chose not to respect the ancient customs and had the asylum seekers dispatched from the sanctuary to prison.[820] The historiographer does not tell us how frequently the empress used such measures, but he was convinced that her behavior provoked divine wrath. One alleged consequence was an earthquake that seriously damaged the dome of Hagia Sophia on May 19, 1346.

Another of Anna's objectionable decisions involved her choice of allies. In 1344, Anna sent a large embassy to the Bulgarian capital of Tarnovo to negotiate a treaty against Kantakouzenos and secure military aid. Following the successful conclusion of the negotiations, she gave the Bulgarians Plovdiv, Cepina, Kričim, Peruštica, Enos, Voden, and part of the Rhodope region. Ultimately, the alliance proved worthless as the tsar requested time to prepare for war but never actually joined in the fighting,[821] leaving Anna to seek a new alliance. Although the Turks represented a serious threat to the empire, the empress's ambassadors sought Turkish assistance against her opponent on at least five occasions.[822] Interestingly, the historian Doukas does not place the blame for this decision on Anna but on the people of Constantinople when he writes,

> The Constantinopolitans then conceived an evil design (. . .). They convinced Empress Anna, the mother of Emperor John, who was still a boy, to send ambassadors to Orhan, the aforementioned ruler of Bithynia and Phrygia and also of Paphlagonia, to ask for aid and assistance in combatting Kantakouzenos as a rebel against the Empire.[823]

In his chronicle, Gregoras criticizes Anna for allowing the 'crazy' Apokaukos to rule the state and for cherishing "hopes (. . .) to lead a carefree life completely without worries."[824] Based on this passage, several scholars have concluded that the empress must have fallen in love; nevertheless, they do not agree on the identity of her lover,[825] and the sources do not mention one. A liaison of any kind would have been most dangerous for a woman in Anna's position; therefore, if the empress did

820 *Gregoras* II, 748 f. (XV,1). *Kantakouzenos* II, 300 (III, 50).

821 *Kantakouzenos* II, 406 f. (III,66). Rychlík (2000), 127.

822 *Dölger, Regesten* V, ns. 1895, 2902–2904, 2906. According to Jorga (Jorga (1906)) and Nicol (Nicol (1996), 88), Turkish settlements in Europe were one of the consequences of Anna's struggle with Kantakouzenos.

823 *Doukas*, 55 (VIII,1).

824 *Gregoras* II, 702 (XIV,3).

825 For an overview, see *Van Dieten* III, 317 f., n. 277. Authors have variously identified Anna's supposed lover with Apokaukos (thus explaining Anna's cruelty towards his assassins), a Slav by the name of Dobrotitza, the *mystikos* Kinnamos, and the son of Isabella de la Rochette, Eduardo. None of these suggestions is confirmed by the sources. For details, see Muratore (1906), 251 f.

have a lover, she did well to keep the fact a secret. Considering the passage and the lack of evidence for a literal interpretation, Van Dieten's translation, which indicates that the empress was blinded by her desire[826] to achieve her ends, triumph over her opponents, and see her son safely ensconced on the throne, is more persuasive.

Whether or not Anna entertained romantic feelings for the general, by 1344 she must have realized that Apokaukos could not be trusted. He attempted to acquire Lesbos and Chios and, during the siege of Herakleia in August 1344, tried once more to wed John V to his daughter.[827] This time John Gabalas informed the empress of her counselor's intentions, and Anna swiftly ordered John V to return to the capital. To get back into the empress's good graces, Apokaukos bribed Anna's ladies-in-waiting to request an audience for him so that he could bring the empress "most valuable and beautiful jewels."[828] Again, he was able to persuade Anna to forgive him; in the next passage, we find him engaged in strengthening the defenses of Constantinople. However, as Sandra Origone pointed out,[829] the harm had been done, and the alliance had cracked. Anna refused to allow her son to marry Apokaukos's daughter, and the rebuffed general[830] must have realized that she would not support any further extension of his influence. For her part, Anna could certainly have entertained no illusions about the loyalty of the man after his double attempt at betrayal.

Anna's camp was gradually falling apart. Apokaukos had fallen out with the patriarch,[831] and the empress's own trust in John Kalekas had suffered a serious blow when, whether from an awareness of the terrible situation of an empire ravaged by civil war or from the realization that military fortunes had begun to favor their opponents, the patriarch suggested that she make peace with Kantakouzenos in 1344.[832] Initially, the empress and her advisors were still able to agree on a common course of action, for in February 1345, they dispatched an embassy to the *megas domestikos,* promising him protection if he would give up his imperial title.[833] Kantakouzenos did not accept their conditions but sent ambassadors of his own to Constantinople. His legate, John Chrysoberges, was to seek a private audience with Anna to ask whether she held real political power or whether the patriarch was acting on her behalf and without her knowledge.[834] Of course, Apokaukos and

826 *Van Dieten* III, 118.
827 *Gregoras* II, 702 (XIV,3). See also *Van Dieten* III, 316 f, n. 275. Origone (1999), 109 f.
828 *Gregoras,* II, 711 (XIV,5). Muratore (1906), 171.
829 Origone (1999), 112.
830 On one occasion, Apokaukos threatened to abandon Anna unless their children were married. *Kantakouzenos* II, 539 ff. (III,87).
831 Weiss (1969), 119.
832 *Gregoras* II, 767 (XV,7).
833 *Kantakouzenos* II, 445 (III,73). *Dölger, Regesten* V, 12, n. 2901. Malamut (2014A), 113.
834 *Kantakouzenos* II, 472 ff. (III,75).

Kalekas did not allow a private meeting between the empress and the ambassador. Kantakouzenos later described Anna's situation in the following words: "She sits in the palace under guard and differs little from a prisoner in prison. What difference is there between her and him [the prisoner] when she cannot make an important decision or set it in action but is obliged to follow the decisions of those who hold power?"[835] His testimony adds further weight to the claim that the two men were withholding information from Anna and acting behind her back.

In June 1345, Apokaukos was murdered by his political opponents while inspecting the prison where he had placed them.[836] Anna was furious over the loss of the capable general and dealt with the culprits accordingly.[837] Given time to reflect, she might have realized that she had now regained part of her lost freedom. As Elisabeth Malamut noted, the uncompromising approach of the empress can only be explained by her fear for herself and her children should Kantakouzenos triumph.[838]

The following year, Anna finally took matters into her own hands. With Apokaukos dead and the patriarch corresponding with Kantakouzenos,[839] and therefore untrustworthy, the empress must have realized that she had to rely on herself. This awareness had come too late, however, and now one catastrophe followed another. She attempted to engage a military leader and governor of Thessalonike named John Batatzes[840] as her advisor, but he was killed by the Turks before she could profit from his services.[841] The Serbian tsar, Stephan Dušan, then invaded Byzantium[842] and crowned himself 'emperor of the Greeks and the Slavs' in Serres on April 16, 1346, openly admitting his desire to take Byzantium for his own. In May, Kantakouzenos's coronation was held in Adrianople.[843] Hard-pressed

835 *Kantakouzenos* II, 470 f. (III,75).

836 *Gregoras* II, 729–733 (XIV,10). *Kantakouzenos* II, 543 (III,88). It was apparently located in the palace of Constantine the Great, see Muratore (1906), 138; for the event, see 186–190.

837 *Gregoras* II, 735–740 (XIV,10), see especially 735 f. Gregoras provides a vivid description of the final struggle of the unarmed prisoners, who fled to the Monastery of Nea Mone to claim asylum. Allegedly at the command of the empress, they were brutally murdered on "holy ground." The historian offers a terrifying image of Anna forbidding the relatives of the murdered men to lament their dead and ordering that the bodies be cast into the sea for the birds and fish to eat; however, this order was not carried out, and the dead received a quiet but decent burial. This sharp criticism of the empress is certainly connected with Gregoras's strong prejudice against her on account of her pro-Palamite position. See also *Kantakouzenos* II, 541–545 (III,88). Origone (1999), 113.

838 Malamut (2014A), 113.

839 *Gregoras* II, 755–762 (XV,3 f.).

840 For details, see *PLP*, n. 2518.

841 *Gregoras* II, 741–744 (XIV,11).

842 *Gregoras* II, 746 f. (XV,1–2).

843 *Gregoras* II, 762 (XV,5).

on every side, Anna took golden ornaments and chalices from the churches and confiscated the property of the citizens of Constantinople.[844] She also requested help from the Turkish satraps who appeared near Constantinople in the late spring of 1346.[845] This in no way served her cause as the Turks pillaged the area surrounding the city, taking many prisoners of war and sorely abusing them.[846] As the empress was unable to provide them with leaders to guide them through the country, the Turks accepted valuable gifts from both her and Kantakouzenos and returned home.[847]

Though Anna's reign took place during one of the most turbulent periods of Byzantine history and her means were often limited, she did find funds to support architecture and the arts. She ordered an architect named Phakeolos to build the great *stoa* (or *porticus)* and the tabernacle (or bema) in Hagia Sophia,[848] and when a severe earthquake damaged the great cathedral in May 1346, she sponsored the rebuilding of the tabernacle and the great apse.[849] She also sponsored the creation of a *de luxe* Psalter[850] and later donated it to the Great Lavra Monastery on Athos. It was produced by Chariton, a resident monk of the Hodegon Monastery, sometime before 1346,[851] which indicates a close relationship between Anna and her immediate family and that monastic house.

Anna and the Palamite struggle

In addition to the challenges arising from the intrigue-ridden politics of the day, Anna was soon to become involved in a religious conflict as well. A recent convert to Orthodoxy with no real foundation in Eastern theology, she must have found the

844 *Gregoras* II, 748 f. (XV,1).
845 *Gregoras* II, 763 ff. (XV,5). *Doukas*, 55 (VIII,1).
846 *Gregoras* II, 764 (XV,5).
847 *Gregoras* II, 763 f. (XV,5).
848 *Kantakouzenos* III, 30 (IV,4).
849 *Mioni, Cronaca inedita*, 74, n. 12. See also *ibid.*, 80, n. 12.
850 Given this connection between Anna and the Holy Mountain, the authors of the *PLP* identified her as "the holy lady, Anastasia the nun," whose name appears in a list of donors to the Protatos Monastery. While this is possible, the nun's identity cannot be positively established without further evidence. For reference, see also *Polites, Katalogoi*, 133, n. 340. Other authors have supported this belief, see Djurić (1981), 149 f. Politis (1958), 263 f. Talbot (2011–2012), 273.
851 The inscription in the manuscript runs as follows: (fol. 261v.) "Θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον καὶ χαρίτονος πόνος." (fol. 262v.) " Ἄννα βασιλὶς ἡ Παλαιολογίνα./Δα(βὶ)δ θεόπνουν πυκτίον βασιλέως/ἕδρασε λαμπρὸν εἰς Θ(εο)ῦ μολπὴν λόγου/αὐτῆς τε σῶστρον καὶ γόνου βασιλέως/Ἐτῶν χιλίων ἑξάκις περιόδῳ/ὀκτακοσίων σύν γε πεντηκοντάδι/καὶ τετράδι τέτευχε/Δα(βὶ)δ πυκτίδα/ἄννα βασιλὶς ἀγλαὴν λαμπρὰν λίαν." *Pelekanides, Treasures* II, 325 f. See also Politis (1958), 263 f.

controversy difficult to comprehend.[852] As the conflict over *hesychasm* (Palamism) will come up repeatedly in the following chapters, an explanation of the teaching is in order. In the first half of the fourteenth century, the monks of Athos developed the Christian practice known as *hesychasm*, which employed the Lord's Prayer, meditation, frequent Communion, and controlled breathing to promote spiritual growth and to allow practitioners to enter into direct contact with God – to see the 'Uncreated Light.' After a long and detailed study, John Meyendorff characterized Byzantine hesychasm of the fourteenth century as a "spiritual revival which touched every aspect of the Christian life, inner perfection as well as the sacramental life and social witness."[853] This practice, whose chief defender was an Athonite monk named Gregory Palamas, soon acquired opponents among scholars and theologians, mainly those in the Byzantine capital.[854] Barlaam of Calabria, Gregory Akindynos, and the historian Nikephoros Gregoras[855] became subsequent leaders of the anti-Palamite movement.

In the Byzantine empire, politics and religion were notoriously intertwined. John Kantakouzenos supported Palamas (who had previously refused to endorse either political party[856]) while John Kalekas and Empress Anna backed the opposition. In June 1341, Andronikos III had presided over a synod that upheld the teaching of Gregory Palamas despite the arguments of Palamas's former friend, Gregory Akindynos. The patriarch, eager to encourage discord between the empress and Kantakouzenos, ordained Akindynos a bishop in 1341. Anna protested the ordination of a man whom her late husband had condemned as a heretic.[857] Relying on Andronikos's judgment, she overrode the patriarchal decision and had Akindynos imprisoned. As Kantakouzenos became increasingly involved with the Palamites, the controversy gained political momentum. In September 1342, Anna had Palamas arrested and, later, imprisoned;[858] Akindynos was freed and ordained a priest, becoming a powerful figure in the patriarchal court.[859]

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852 For a detailed account, see Origone (1999), 115–117. Muratore (1906), 98 f. Jugie (1931), esp. 410–414.

853 Meyendorff (1964), 25. For an overview of the Palamite Controversy 1341–1368, see Jugie (1931).

854 For an introduction to the Palamite controversy, see *Gregoras, Antirrhetika* I, 101–111. For a detailed study of the life and doctrine of Gregory Palamas, see Meyendorff (1964).

855 For a good overview of the Palamite arguments, see Origone (1999), 70–72. *Gregoras, Antirrhetika*, 111. Nicol (1972B), 220–223. On Barlaam and Akindynos and their opposition to hesychasm, see Meyendorff (1964), 42–62. On Gregoras, see Meyendorff (1964), 93 f.

856 Meyendorff (1964), 64.

857 For a detailed explanation, see Meyendorff (1964), 58.

858 Meyendorff (1964), 69 f.

859 Meyendorff (1964), 70–73, 75.

As the group surrounding the empress began to disintegrate, Apokaukos sided with Palamas (against the patriarch).[860] In 1344, Anna had a serious disagreement with the patriarch when he advised her to make peace with Kantakouzenos.[861] Angry that the metropolitan had secretly corresponded with her opponent and desperate to win her struggle, Anna realized the importance of keeping the Orthodox Church on her side and began to reverse her anti-Palamite policy.[862] She freed Gregory Palamas from prison and embraced his teaching. Having found a replacement for John Kalekas, Anna decided to summon a synod to denounce the actions of the patriarch and depose him.[863] She requested a compendium of the dogmatic works of Philotheos Kokkinos and Gregory Palamas[864] as well as an anti-Palamite volume produced by the patriarch.[865] Apparently, she sincerely wished to acquire a balanced opinion[866] because she called on two scholars who had not yet taken sides in the controversy, David Dishypatos and Nikephoros Gregoras, to give her their opinions in writing.[867] Unfortunately, the sources provide no information on the empress's theological knowledge base; therefore, it is unclear how well she understood these texts and whether she was truly persuaded by the Palamite argumentation.

At the end of January 1347, Anna presided over the gathered representatives of the Orthodox Church although the sitting had to be postponed due to (her) illness.[868] The synod confirmed the teachings of Gregory Palamas and deposed

860 Meyendorff (1964), 75.

861 *Gregoras* II, 767 (XV,7); 780 f. (XV,9). Meyendorff (1964), 79.

862 Meyendorff (1959), 116.

863 *Kantakouzenos* II, 604 (III,99). *Darrouzès, Regestes* IV, 42 f., n. 2263 (lists the charges against the patriarch). *Kalothetes*, 72. *Gregoras* II, 767 f. (XV,7).

864 Weiss (1969), 122. For a brief explanation of the teachings Palamas addressed to the empress, see *Palamas, Syngrammata*, 545 ff.

865 *Gregoras* II, 590 (XII,5).

866 *Gregoras* II, 590 (XII,5). The Palamites repeatedly mention Anna's support in their works. One example was the new patriarch, Isidore, who succeeded John Kalekas in 1347, see *MM* I, 290. Weiss (1969), 122. Weiss notes that this text does not offer Anna profuse thanks but expresses only a measured politeness. Muratore (1906), 216 f.

867 Meyendorff (1959), 117 f. For her request to Dishypatos, see *Treu, Palamas*, 228. Meyendorff (1964), 78. Jugie (1931), 411.

868 *Gregoras* II, 780 f., 784 (XV,9). *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 84, 46a; 681, 3. A tomos was apparently created but later destroyed. See *Van Dieten*, 367 f., n. 468. For the final version of the *Tomos* published by John Kantakouzenos (and edited by Meyendorff), see *Meyendorff, Tome synodal.* See also *Kantakouzenos* III, 180 (IV,24). Origone (1999), 123, 187 f. Muratore (1906), 218 f. For a report by John Kantakouzenos, describing the condemnation of the anti-Palamites, see *Darrouzès, Lettre inédite*, 16. On this occasion, the emperor describes Anna as his 'sister.' For another reference to the synod, see *Kantakouzenos, Refutationes*, 4. *Tomus synodicus*, II col. 711C. Nicol (1968), 63. For further details, see *Van Dieten*, 366 f, n. 465. *Darrouzès, Regestes* IV, n. 2266. Malamut (2014A), 115. For further details on Kantakouzenos entering the city, see *Kantakouzenos* II, 605 f. (III,99). Nicol (1996A), 115. *Kantakouzenos* III, 180 (IV,24).

Patriarch John Kalekas on February 2.[869] That same night, Kantakouzenos entered the city with the help of his allies. Gregoras, embittered by his struggle against Palamas, lost no time in pointing out that the empress had been deprived of the empire as soon as she abandoned 'Orthodox teaching.'[870]

Reconciliation with Kantakouzenos

When Kantakouzenos entered Constantinople,[871] Anna locked herself in the palace.[872] He initiated negotiations the following day, promising that he would rule jointly with Anna (and John V) and allow her to take first place in acclamations as well as public ceremonies if she would agree to their reconciliation. Anna refused his proposal and secretly requested weapons and support from her Italian compatriots at Galata.[873] Her behavior in this dire situation may appear to be utter folly, but it could also be interpreted as proof that she was convinced that her opponent would kill both her and her children in order to make room for a new dynasty on the Byzantine throne. By evening, two triremes were attempting to either join the empress's party and fight for her or bring her and her children to safety in Galata. Kantakouzenos's soldiers put up a determined fight and forced the ships to withdraw.

On February 4, Kantakouzenos sent another embassy with a message similar to the first, requesting that Anna make peace with him and accept him as emperor. They would rule conjointly, but Anna and John V would take precedence in public ceremonies. Again, nothing was achieved.[874] The next day, some Kantakouzenos soldiers attacked the palace with fire and gained control over parts of it. The following night was a sleepless one for the empress. At dawn, she gathered her counselors to determine their next course of action.[875] Under the circumstances, a compromise was unavoidable. Anna, persuaded by her son,[876] sent Kantakouzenos an embassy led by Gregory Palamas and Andronikos Asen, Kantakouzenos's

869 *Kantakouzenos* II, 601–604 (III,98), III, 180 (IV,24). *Meyendorff, Tome synodal*, 216. *Gregoras* II, 783 f. (XV,9). For details on the deposition of the patriarch and especially for details on the charges against him, see Dennis (1960A). Meyendorff (1964), 79 f. Nicol (1996A), 80. Jugie (1931), 412 f.

870 *Gregoras* II, 887 (XVIII,4).

871 *Gregoras* II, 775–784 (XV,8–9). For details, see *Van Dieten* III, 364 ff., fn. 459. I have followed the chronology of events as suggested by Van Dieten. Muratore (1906), 219 f.

872 *Gregoras* II, 773 ff. (XV,8). *Kantakouzenos* II, 604–615 (III,99 f.), see especially 611 f. *Doukas*, 63 (X,1). *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* II, 268 f. Origone (1999), 120 f. Nicol (1968), 63.

873 *Gregoras* II, 775 (XV,8).

874 *Gregoras* II, 777 f. (XV,8).

875 *Gregoras* II, 779 (XV,8).

876 *Kantakouzenos* II, 612 f. (III,100).

father-in-law.[877] On February 8, the two parties reached an agreement, and John VI entered the imperial palace.[878] According to *De cerimoniis*, the ceremonial book of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, when a new emperor entered the city, the empress "already in the palace" was to meet him in the Hall of the Augousteus and the emperor was to kiss her head.[879] However, the Hall of the Augousteus was falling apart, and the residential palace of the imperial family was now that of Blacherns, far to the north of the city, and not the Great Palace of Constantine's day. Doukas reports that John VI arrived at the palace and found the empress there – fearless. He kissed the hand of John V, bowed to Anna, and addressed them as 'emperor and empress of the Romans.'[880] Anna and Kantakouzenos then endorsed the Agreement of Blacherns,[881] which promised a general amnesty and the restoration of possessions to their original owners. It established a new division of powers as well. For a period of ten years, John Kantakouzenos was to hold supreme power; thereafter, the two emperors would reign as equals.[882] For his part, Kantakouzenos promised that he would defend John Palaiologos and would not pass the imperial title to his own descendants. In turn, Anna and John V swore that they would not raise arms against Kantakouzenos but would respect his orders.[883] It was also decided that John V would marry Helene, the daughter of Kantakouzenos.[884] Their union was apparently meant to solidify and facilitate future relations between the two imperial families.

The agreement does not specify Anna's position, suggesting that her regency was no longer needed as her son was officially of age. Like her son, Anna was expected to submit to Kantakouzenos in affairs of state despite a show of precedence in public. In accordance with the stipulations of the agreement, John VI took matters firmly in hand and did not ask the advice of the empress or her son. Anna accepted this new *modus vivendi,* trusting Kantakouzenos's promise that her son would remain heir to the throne. Determined to fulfill her part of the agreement, she went beyond the established custom and welcomed her future daughter-in-law,

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877 Meyendorff (1959), 120. Muratore (1906), 221.

878 For the main points of the agreement, see *Kantakouzenos* II, 614 f. (III,100). Short chronicle n. 113 seems to place the reconciliation of Anna and Kantakouzenos to February 2, but this is probably due to the fact that the author was originally writing about the synod that took place on that day. He then adds a summary of the events that followed without specifying the chronological details. *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 681, n. 3. Origone (1999), 121.

879 *De cerimoniis*, 416 (I,91), *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 416.

880 *Doukas*, 63 (X,2).

881 *Kantakouzenos* II, 614 f. (III,100).

882 For sources, see *Dölger, Regesten* V, 14, n. 2915. See also *Gregoras* II, 779 (XV,8).

883 For sources, see *Dölger, Regesten* V, 15, n. 2918. Doukas offers a much shorter and less informed description of the reconciliation. *Doukas*, 63 f. (X,3).

884 *Kantakouzenos* III, 8 f. (IV,1). Helene's elder sister, Maria, was already married to Nikephoros of Epiros and Theodora had recently wed Sultan Orhan.

Helene, and Helene's mother, Eirene, on their arrival in the imperial city.[885] On May 21, 1347, the empress participated in the second coronation of John VI, this time performed by the newly elected patriarch, Philotheos Kokkinos.[886] She witnessed the wedding of the young imperial couple and the coronation of her daughter-in-law one week later.[887]

The assumption that Anna did not enjoy the festivities does not imply a lack of magnanimity on her part. As others were celebrating, Anna had to say goodbye to her close companion and lady-in-waiting, Isabella de la Rochette, who had decided to return to Italy after twenty years in her service.[888] Anna was no longer able to keep a large court as John VI Kantakouzenos required her to co-finance the reconstruction of the empire after the civil war.[889] By then, the empress must also have realized that both she and her son were effectively isolated from political life for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, she could not have failed to notice the mounting frustration of Matthew Kantakouzenos, the eldest son of the emperor, over the fact that his father had promised that the crown would remain in the Palaiologan line.

Although she retreated from power in 1347, Anna did not cease to watch out for the interests of her family and raise her voice in protest when she felt that the Palaiologans were being forced into the background. In 1350, for example, Anna's two-year-old grandson Andronikos (IV) was proclaimed co-emperor, but on the next Sunday of Orthodoxy (March 6, 1351), his name was not mentioned among the names of the emperors. Anna objected, and the proclamation took place again on the following Sunday, this time including Andronikos.[890]

Embassy to the Serbs

Following the coronation of John VI in Constantinople, life in the empire appeared to be returning to normal. In April 1348, Helene Palaiologina gave birth to her firstborn, Andronikos, and it seemed as though the two imperial families would be able to coexist peacefully. In 1350, John Kantakouzenos took his son-in-law to Thessalonike[891] in order to end the rule of the Zealots (1342–1350)[892] in this strategic city. It was a risky decision, but as the Zealots had sided (at least verbally) with the Palaiologans throughout the Second Civil War, Kantakouzenos believed

885 *Kantakouzenos* III, 11 f. (IV,1).
886 *Kantakouzenos* III, 29 (IV,4).
887 *Gregoras* II, 788 f. (XV,11). Origone (1999), 124. Muratore (1906), 223.
888 *Kantakouzenos* III, 54 (IV,9). Muratore (1906), 223.
889 *Gregoras* II, 790 (XV,11).
890 *Gregoras* II, 879 (XVIII,2).
891 For an outline of the history of the city, see Origone (1999), 137–144.
892 For details, see *ODB* III, 2221 f.

that if his son-in-law were to govern Thessalonike, it would rejoin the empire.[893] And indeed, the Thessalonians welcomed John V joyfully, and there was peace in Thessaly for a time.

Despite these promising developments, John VI had misjudged his young co-emperor, who was convinced that he alone was the rightful emperor of all Byzantium. John V soon became discontented with his limited power and took steps to assume his inheritance as the sole ruler of the empire. He conspired with the Serbian tsar, Stephan Uroš IV Dušan,[894] who must have welcomed an invitation to interfere in Byzantine affairs. In the spring of 1351, the tsar, his wife, and the Serbian army pitched their tents outside the city walls of Thessalonike.[895] To further separate the young emperor from his father-in-law, Dušan offered John the hand of a Bulgarian princess, the younger sister of his own wife, if John would repudiate Helene.[896] When Kantakouzenos learned of these events, he realized he had to act quickly (not least of all because of the threat to the status of his daughter and her children). He persuaded Anna to reason with her son and ask for an end to the hostilities.[897] In the words of Gregoras

> Kantakouzenos took Anna, his [John V's] mother, who at that time was kept in Byzantion [Constantinople], and brought her to Hodegon Monastery where in front of the divine icon he promised her son, his son-in-law, an immediate control over his heritage, the empire, if he would break his agreements with the *kral* and instantly return to Byzantion to his lawful wife. He himself would either rule Byzantion as emperor as far as Selymbria arranging things according to the wishes of his son-in-law or become a monk and lead a carefree life at home. He immediately passed Anna the written decision, secured by most terrible oaths, undeniably witnessed by the most holy Mother of God. With no ground for suspicion, she took the documents along with the written oaths and speedily sailed to Thessalonike. There she discussed them [the documents] with her son and showed him the terrible oaths.[898]

893 According to Professor Nicol, the transfer of John V to Thessalonike took place against Anna's will. Nicol (1972B), 235.
894 *Kantakouzenos* III, 112 f. (IV,16).
895 Muratore (1906), 231 f.
896 See *Gregoras* III, 148 (XVII,27). For an account of Anna's mission to Thessalonike, see Origone (1999), 131 f.
897 The chronicle of John VI Kantakouzenos mentions that the senior emperor was involved in a war with the Latins at this time. Nicol (1996), 92. Nicol (1972B), 244 f. Failler (1973), 78. Muratore (1906), 232 f. Nicol (1996A), 116 f.
898 *Gregoras* III, 149 (XXVII,27). The same story is told later on (*Gregoras* III, 169 f. (XXVII,52)), this time from John V's perspective as he recounts the wrongs he suffered at the hands of his father-in-law. For further information on vows in Byzantium, see Oikonomides (1963), especially 111–116. See also, Melichar (2017), 121.

Kantakouzenos also recorded a version of the interview with the empress. He does not mention an oath but only a speech in which he complained about John V's ill-intentioned advisors.[899] The words of Gregoras sound more believable since Anna would hardly have been persuaded to act on Kantakouzenos's behalf without a strong incentive.

When Anna entered Thessalonike, preparations for war were well underway. The empress rose to the occasion, reminding her son of the importance of honoring and obeying his parents. Having secured his submission, she departed for the Serbian camp. There she spoke at length with the tsar's wife, Helen of Serbia, protesting the deceitfulness of the Serbians, threatening them with heavenly punishments, and predicting their destruction unless they abandoned the expedition.[900] As a daughter of the Bulgarian tsar, the tsarina was well educated and, in Serbia, presided over a bilingual (Serbian and Greek) court. Though it is unlikely that Anna would have been able to intimidate Helen, she did achieve her goal: the Serbs withdrew.

It would be naïve to interpret Anna's actions as an expression of trust towards Kantakouzenos and their agreement of 1347. Considering the growing ambition of Matthew and his rebellion against his father in the fall of 1347, she probably realized that her son would still have to fight to come into his inheritance. Having learned from her own mistakes, she must also have realized that powerful allies and advisors with objectives of their own were dangerous; the friendly behavior of the Serbian tsar (who had called himself 'emperor of the Slavs and the Greeks' in 1346) did not deceive her.

Capitalizing on her political triumph with the Serbians, the empress took energetic steps to secure Thessalonike and make it a new base of Palaiologan power because, despite his promises, John VI had not yet transferred supreme authority to his junior co-emperor. Aware that she would have to live in the shadow of the Kantakouzenos family in Constantinople, excluded from the government and unable to help her son, Anna decided to remain where she was. She advised John V to request the rule of Ainos and the cities on Chalkidike, promising his father-in-law complete obedience in the future in exchange.[901] His request granted, John departed for Thrace,[902] leaving his mother in charge of the strategic city of Thessalonike.[903]

899 *Kantakouzenos* III, 200–204 (IV,27).
900 *Kantakouzenos* III, 208 (IV,27). Nicol (1972B), 245.
901 For an overview of the complicated co-rule of John V and John VI, see Failler (1973), 76–81.
902 For a comprehensive description of Anna's meeting with John Kantakouzenos and her actions in Thessalonike, see *Kantakouzenos* III, 200–209 (IV,27).
903 For Anna's reasons for remaining in the city, see Origone (1999), 143. On Anna's government, see Loenertz (1970), 313 ff.

Mission accomplished

From Thessalonike,[904] Anna continued to follow the movements of her son,[905] who must have informed her about his subsequent stays in Didymoteichon, Ainos, and on Tenedos.[906] The sources suggest that they were in regular contact through legates.[907] After a failed attempt to seize Constantinople in March 1353, the young emperor returned to Tenedos and, perhaps fearing retribution, brought his wife and eldest son to the safety of Thessalonike.[908] Besides visiting his mother, he probably wanted to ask her advice as he waited for the reaction of his in-laws. Nothing is known about Anna's relationship with her daughter-in-law although the fact that the senior empress had persuaded her son to refuse the Serbian offer of marriage suggests that she had accepted Helene as family.

In the same year, 1353, John V once again negotiated with the Serbian tsar, requesting an army from him. The tsar was willing to oblige him but demanded the emperor's brother Michael as a hostage in return.[909] The sources hardly ever mention this prince, who apparently had no taste for politics. Whether he was living quietly in Constantinople or at his mother's court in Thessalonike, his peaceful existence came to an abrupt end in 1353 when his brother sent him to Serbia. It is not clear whether he ever returned, but the Byzantine sources do not mention his name again.

John Kantakouzenos was angered by the attack on Constantinople, which he would have perceived as breaking the agreement of 1347, and the measures he took in response to it were severe indeed. He had his son Matthew proclaimed his successor[910] and crowned him in February 1354. John and Helene were left out of the acclamations, and even though Anna and her grandson (Andronikos) continued to be remembered,[911] it was Matthew who was now next in line as far as imperial succession was concerned. Unfortunately, the sources do not specify Anna's role in the successful landing of John V in Constantinople in November of the same year, but it is possible that she provided financial backing for the venture. Towards the end of 1354, it must have been with great satisfaction that she learned her son was master of the Byzantine capital and his father and mother-in-law had entered a monastery.[912] The following year, the empress may have participated

904 Nicol (1968), 79.

905 The events of this final phase of the civil war are summarized by Muratore (1906), 227 ff.

906 *Gregoras* III, 182 (XVIII,8).

907 *Gregoras* III, 184 (XVIII,11). Gregoras mentions the arrival of a man bringing news from Thessalonike, probably sent by Anna.

908 *Kantakouzenos* III, 255 f. (IV,35). *Gregoras* III, 187 f. (XXVIII,18). Nicol (1968), 81.

909 *Kantakouzenos* III, 246 (IV,34).

910 Origone (1999), 133.

911 *Kantakouzenos* III, 269. *Gregoras* III, 188 f. Nicol (1968), 113.

912 For details, see the chapter on Eirene Kantakouzene. See also Origone (1999), 135. Muratore (1906), 242. For the reign of John V, see Radić (1993).

in the wedding of her younger daughter, Maria, whom John V had promised to his supporter, Francesco I Gattilusio, the Lord of Lesbos. Anna also lived to hear of the gathering in Epibatai (December 1356) where Matthew Kantakouzenos, who had been captured by the Serbians and handed over to John V, removed his red shoes and vowed loyalty to his brother-in-law. The year 1356 continued to shower good fortune on Anna when her daughter Eirene, who had left home at the age of nine to marry the Bulgarian tsar, returned in the company of the nine-year-old Bulgarian princess Keraca, who was destined to marry Anna's grandson, Andronikos. Though other problems plagued the empire in the remaining nine years of her life, the empress could be content. Despite the terrible price paid by the Byzantine people, her son had succeeded his father as sovereign ruler on the imperial throne, and her role as regent had been brought to a successful close.

The lady of Thessalonike

Anna spent her remaining years in Thessalonike. Apparently, she had grown fond of the city and felt no urge to return to the capital, where everything must have reminded her of the husband she had lost and the traumatic years of the civil war. In Thessaly, she did not need to see the members of the Kantakouzenos family, and she could be her own mistress while guarding her son's interests in this vital region. Judging from the scanty evidence, the empress became involved in the ecclesiastical life of the city as well as in its architecture and government. Donald Nicol, evaluating Anna's reign, wrote that the empress's "management of the second city of the Empire was more forceful and more successful than that of her son John. Her reign there was later to be remembered as an era of peace after the social and political upheavals which had afflicted Thessalonica in the years before."[913]

Following the long struggle over theological issues during the civil war, the empress came to appreciate the teachings of Gregory Palamas, who had assumed the position of archbishop of Thessalonike in the meantime. After his death, she launched an inquiry into the miracles attributed to Palamas,[914] thereby contributing to his eventual elevation to sainthood by the Orthodox Church.[915] In her final years, Anna became the nun Anastasia and made at least one pious donation corroborated by a written order (*prostagma*) of Manuel II. The document states that the grandmother of the emperor donated a plot of land and the surrounding buildings and shops to the Thessalonian Nunnery of Sts. Anargyroi in exchange for commemoration of her late husband, Andronikos III, and her second son, Michael Palaiologos, who apparently predeceased his mother.[916] A recent study suggests

913 Nicol (1996A), 117.

914 *PG* 151, 711 C–D. Loenertz (1970), 315. Meyendorff (1964), 112.

915 *Contra Prochorum Cydonium*, col. 711C–D. Origone (1999), 149.

916 *Actes de Lavra*, III, 163 ff., see especially 163, 165. See also Barišić (1971), 181. Origone (1999), 145. The sources do not mention Michael's life or career after his departure for Serbia; nevertheless, Anna's donation suggests that he died prematurely.

that Anna's palace was connected with the convent and identifies the convent church with the preserved Church of St. Elijah.[917]

Other documents portray the empress as an active ruler and a judge in various property disputes. In May 1355, the empress issued a *prostagma* ordering the *megalos dioiketes*[918] John Doukas Balsamon to return various properties to the Monastery of Docheiariou.[919] Five years later, the monks of Docheiariou again appealed to the empress for aid. Their *oikonomos,*[920] Hysbes, had come to Thessalonike sometime earlier to take care of the properties of his monastery in the area. He had sold a vineyard to a certain Trikanas, who failed to pay the agreed-upon price after Hysbes died on the day of the sale. Furthermore, Trikanas had entered Hysbes's cell and distributed the goods he found there partly to the poor and partly to the dead man's heirs. In response to the plea of the monks, the empress ordered an inquiry to be held in her presence and attended by the abbots of the monasteries of Akapniou, Chortaitou, Dobrosontos, Hypomimneskontos, and Gorgepekoos. Acting as judge in this complicated matter, the empress decided that the monastery should retain the vineyard without any external interference.[921] Additional evidence suggests that Anna was a successful ruler, perceived by the inhabitants of Thessalonike as someone concerned with the welfare of the city. In 1351, Nicholas Kabasilas addressed a memorandum against usury to her and later eulogized the empress as a good woman and ruler.[922]

In his study of the documents connected with the empress, Barišić makes an interesting observation when he emphasizes that "Anna, even though she had full power to make sovereign decisions, never published chrysobulls[923] in her own name and never issued orders with a *menologem* written in red."[924] All of her documents, like those of the other empresses, were *horismoi*[925] (orders of lesser importance, usually issued by an empress, *doux*, despot, or metropolitan). Nevertheless, Barišić's claim that Anna never adopted the imperial signature should be admitted with caution. For at least the five-month period preceding the coronation of John V, she was the only crowned authority in the empire and the only person authorized to sign and issue imperial chrysobulls. Unfortunately, no material evidence from this period exists to provide further evidence of Anna's perception of her own status.

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917 For details, see Tantsis (2014), 85 f.

918 A high-ranking treasury official. For details, see *ODB* I, 627 f.

919 *Actes de Docheiariou*, 192, for the text, see 193.

920 An official charged with the administration of monastic properties.

921 *Actes de Docheiariou*, 208–213, n. 35. See also *ibid.*, 218, n. 35.

922 Loenertz (1970), 317–320. *Kabasilas, Panegyrics*, 118–121.

923 Chrysobulls were the most solemn of imperial documents and bore the imperial signature in red. For details, see *ODB* I, 451 f.

924 Barišić (1971), 199.

925 For details, see *ODB* II, 946.

In order to complete the survey of artifacts bearing witness to Anna's reign in Thessalonike, brief attention must also be given to coins. The empress minted a set of *stamena* that depict her as ruler of the city. On the obverse, she stands holding a scepter in her right hand and a model of a city with towers in her left hand while the hand of God blesses her from above. The reverse depicts John V ringed by three stars. Variations of these symbols appear on other *stamena* from this period as well.[926]

One final reminder of Anna's time in Thessaly is a gate, known as the Palaiologina Gate (see Ill. 8), built into the northeastern wall of the city. Constructed by *kastrofylax* John Chamaetes around 1355–1356 at the written command of the empress, it survives as a testimony to her building activities.[927]

Anna's demise

Muratore claims that in 1359[928] Anna paid a brief, private visit to Italy to the court of her nephew, Amadeo VI. It was her intention to revisit the places of her childhood and perhaps to strengthen the contacts between the Savoy and the Palaiologan families (which were yet to play an important role in the life of her son). She then returned to Byzantium.[929] At some point during her final years, she took her vows, along with the name Anastasia, and lived in Thessaly according to monastic precepts[930] until her death, which probably occurred in the summer of

926 Bendall–Donald (1979), 248–253, ns. 2–7. In the last example, there are two nimbate figures with spears in their right hands. For further literature on Anna and coins, see Origone (1999), 80 f., fn. 6, 7. Nicol (1968), 102, fn. 174. *PLP*, n. 21347, see literature.

927 Barišić (1971), 181. See also Loenertz (1955), 217. For details, see Tafrali (1913), 49, 81, 99 f. Spieser (1973), 175 f. Lemerle (1957), 271–286. Dennis (1960), 101. Origone (1999), 145. For further details on patronage in late Byzantine Thessalonike, see Rautman (1989).

928 The date is supplied by Muratore (Muratore (1906), 245). In a letter written in the summer of 1365, Demetrios Kydones mentions Anna's death (*Kydones* I, 128, n. 94). For a commentary on the letter, see *Tinnefeld, Kydones* I, 370 f. Origone (1999), 152. Muratore claims that in her final years, Anna returned to the Catholic faith (Muratore (1906), 242 f.). His opinion, however, finds absolutely no support in the sources, which clearly indicate that Anna exercised supreme power as empress and, for a time, shared a regency with the patriarch, with whom she was in daily contact. Moreover, she died in Thessalonike as an Orthodox nun named Anastasia. Under these circumstances, a strong inclination to Catholicism could hardly have gone unnoticed. For the argument that Anna remained Catholic, see Muratore (1906), 93. For a rebuttal of this claim, see Nicol (1996), 93 f. Origone (1999), 9 f.

929 Muratore (1906), 244.

930 Demetrios Kydones described Anna's pious life in the *prooimion* (introductory part) to a document issued by John V to the Convent of the Prodromos in Thessalonike at his mother's request. For details, see Tinnefeld (1983), 28.



Ill. 8: *The Palaiologina Gate, Thessalonike. (Photo: Jean Housen). Original title: Vue de Thessalonique. Author: Jean Houssen. URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walls_of_Thessaloniki#/media/File:20160516_020_thessaloniki.jpg. Lincence: CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)*

1365. A letter written by Demetrios Kydones reveals that John V was not able to attend the burial of his mother, being obliged to participate in a military expedition. He could only send an official, John Synadenos Astras, to Thessalonike to take command of the city.[931]

Besides an approximate date, little is known about Anna’s death. The reason is probably that she was living as a nun far from the capital, and news of her death did not become widely known. Though it could not have escaped the notice of the inhabitants of the city, the short chronicle or inscription, including details on the circumstances of her death or the location and description of her funeral, have yet to be found. It was obviously this lack of information that led Muratore to believe that the empress had returned to Italy and died there.[932]

931 For details, see Loenertz (1970), 315.
932 Muratore (1906), 244.

Even though Anna's final resting place remains unknown, it is unlikely that she was buried with her family in Italy.[933] Kydones's letter indicates that the empress was buried in Thessalonike, perhaps in the Nunnery of the Prodromos, to which she had made a generous donation.[934] As the remains of other members of the late Byzantine imperial family (such as Eirene-Yolanda, Andronikos IV, and John VII) were later translated to Constantinople, Anna's body may not have remained in Thessalonike permanently. If her remains were brought to the Byzantine capital, then the empress may have been laid to rest alongside her husband, Andronikos III, in the Hodegon Monastery. This possibility is further supported by the fact that her son John later decided against the usual imperial burial ground in the Pantokrator and was likewise buried in the Hodegon. There he could lie beside his father (who had died when John was still a child) and, perhaps, next to his mother as well, the woman to whom he was indebted for his empire.

Anna's timely change of sides and her ensuing long-term support of Gregory Palamas gained her a prominent place in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*. Despite her political mistakes, her role in the Second Civil War, the significant financial losses the empire incurred during her reign, and Anna's hardline approach toward her opponents, the Orthodox continue to vow eternal memory to "our despoina (empress) Anna, according to the divine and angelic robe the nun Anastasia, who her whole life and with all her heart fought to maintain the Apostolic and Patristic teachings of the church and for its cleansing from the evil and godless heresy of Barlaam, Akindynos, and their partisans"[935]– a praise offered to no other late Byzantine empress.

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Due to the complex political circumstances surrounding the Second Civil War, Anna's image as it is presented in the most important sources is a controversial one. On one hand, Nikephoros Gregoras, a man of strong anti-Latin sentiment, described her as "a quick-tempered, superstitious, and easily-influenced woman of mediocre intelligence,"[936] a foreigner who was "unable to step out from the passion of jealousy."[937] In his *Memoirs*, John Kantakouzenos did not present a flattering portrait of Anna either even though he avoided open criticism. Demetrios Kydones, on the other hand, considered the empress an ideal mother, who was "a father and mother, general of the army, defender and savior to her son," but also

933 Muratore (1906), 246. Muratore thought she might have been buried in the (Catholic) Church of St. Francis in Pera. As the available evidence indicates that Anna remained Orthodox, this burial site is unlikely.

934 The two empresses most probably did not reside together; rather, each had her own palace. For details, see Tantsis (2014), 85 f. Tinnefeld (1983), 28.

935 *Gouillard, Synodikon*, 101, 103.

936 *Fatouros, Kantakouzenos*, 269, fn. 258.

937 *Gregoras* II, 761 (XV,4).

"an ideal widow, according to the ideals of the apostle Paul, a woman who lived alone, trusted in the Lord, ate only as much as necessary, shunned splendid robes and everything worldly, and served the Lord day and night, using her voice to sing hymns like her namesake the prophetess Anna."[938] Admittedly stereotypical, this information certainly describes Anna's life after entering the monastery. She also cared for monks and nuns and added luster to the imperial dignity in general.[939] Nicholas Kabasilas likewise praised Anna's philanthropy,[940] virtue,[941] piety (evidently in connection with her backing the Palamite cause), and steadiness in the midst of raging (theological?) debates.[942]

While the negative image of Anna (for the most part created by Gregoras) has significantly impacted modern scholarship, the sources discussed in this chapter provide enough evidence to allow for a softer interpretation of the empress's personality and behavior. In the first place, based on the evidence of the sources, Anna was not power hungry; she never attempted to hold on to her position as ruler and readily handed the government over to her son, who signed all important imperial documents from the time of his coronation.

As for the mistakes Anna made in the course of the Second Civil War, she was certainly influenced by advisors who repeatedly acted behind her back. These same men also managed to persuade the empress that Kantakouzenos would not spare her or her children if he was allowed to assume power. It was (mainly) for these reasons that she so tenaciously opposed the *megas domestikos*, plundering the imperial treasury, cruelly punishing the murderers of Apokaukos (the general supposedly able to counter Kantakouzenos), and continuing to fight until the last possible moment in February 1347. Once Anna could believe that Kantakouzenos did not intend to harm her family, she was willing to cooperate. She fulfilled her ceremonial duties and did not interfere with affairs of state or plot against John VI. At the latter's request, she even willingly embarked on an embassy to Thessalonike. Though she may have given her son some assistance during his *coup d'état*, Anna is not known to have gathered a large following or otherwise prepared for a new civil war.

Anna clearly was not 'of mediocre intelligence' as her successful embassy to the military camp of the Serbian tsar indicates. Though she never trained for a career in government, she proved able to learn under pressure. The surviving documents, especially those related to her reign in Thessalonike, portray an energetic and capable ruler. Similarly, the fact that John V dispatched Astras to Thessalonike to take charge *after her death* reveals that she was not a governor in name only.

938 Tinnefeld (1983), 27 f.
939 Tinnefeld (1983), 28.
940 *Kabasilas, Panegyrics*, 118 f.
941 *Kabasilas, Panegyrics*, 119.
942 *Kabasilas, Panegyrics*, 120.

Though Anna played an important role in preserving the throne for the Palaiologan line, this victory has influenced the way she has been portrayed in modern scholarly literature (as a power-hungry and imperious woman). And yet, given her peaceful rule in Thessalonike and her pious behavior as a nun, it is possible to speculate that had Andronikos III not died prematurely, the sources would not have had much to say about Anna of Savoy except that she was the virtuous, quiet, foreign-born wife of Andronikos and mother of the imperial heir.

VII Eirene Asenina Kantakouzene: An Empress 'of Great Sense and Understanding' (1347–1354)

Empress Eirene outdid other women in both sharp thinking as well as in intelligence and development of character.[943]

Nikephoros Gregoras

For she [the empress Eirene] was intelligent and clever in handling serious matters and in reshaping things in the way she wanted them (...).[944]

John Kantakouzenos

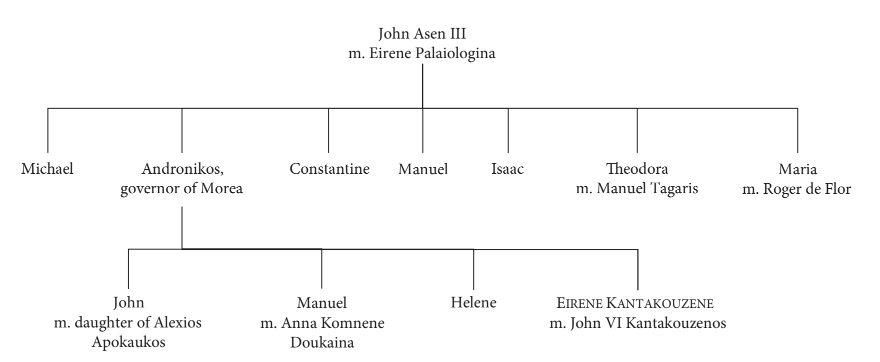
Introduction

When John Kantakouzenos[945] was proclaimed co-emperor in 1341, Eirene Asenina Kantakouzene[946] rose to the imperial honor at his side. Unlike most late Byzantine empresses, she was related to the Palaiologan family not only by marriage but also by blood. Her father, Andronikos Palaiologos Komnenos Asen,[947] was the son of Ivan Asen III of Bulgaria and Eirene Palaiologina, the daughter of Michael VIII. After a *coup d'état*, Ivan and his wife fled from Bulgaria to the Byzantine Empire, where they settled to raise their family (see Tab. 3). Their son Andronikos was governor of the Morea from 1316 to 1321,[948] so it is possible that his children grew up in that area.

Eirene had three siblings: John Asen, Manuel Raoul Asen, and a younger sister named Helene. Next to nothing is known about Eirene's mother or childhood. In 1320, Kantakouzenos noted in his historical writings that he had left his wife behind in Gallipolis, where his family had landed property,[949] so his marriage to

943 *Gregoras* II, 625 (XII,16).
944 *Kantakouzenos* III, 49 (III,6). (Trans.) *Miller, Kantakouzenos*, 185.
945 Zástěrová *et al.* (1996), 322 f. Nicol (1972B), 191–265. Nicol (1996A). On the nature of Kantakouzenos's alleged usurpation, see Melichar (2017B).
946 *PLP*, n. 10935. Nicol (1996), 71–81. Nicol (1968), 104–108. Božilov (1985), part II, 307–311. n. 17.
947 For details on Andronikos, see *Fatouros, Kantakouzenos*, 274, n. 125.
948 For details, see *PLP*, n. 1489.
949 *Kantakouzenos* I, 24 (I,4). Nicol (1996A), 20.

Tab. 3: *A Selected Genealogy of the Asen Family. Based on Trapp (1976), 177. ODB I, 202.*



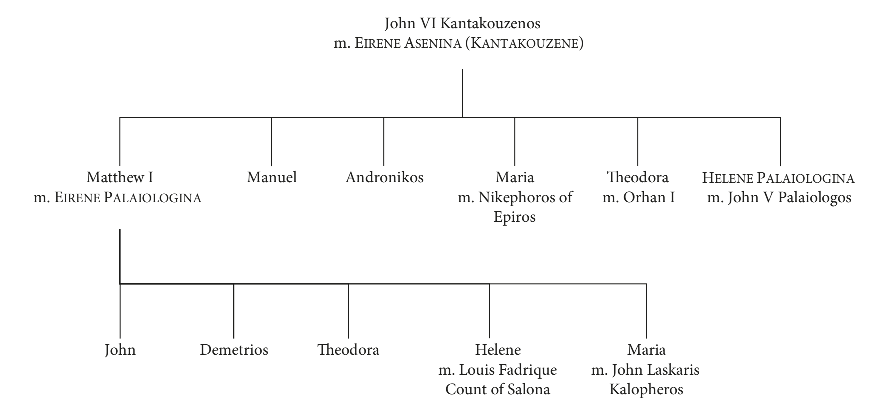
Eirene must have taken place sometime before that date (probably around 1318[950]). It seems that their union was initiated by the groom's formidable mother, Theodora, who recognized the strong personality and character of the young Eirene.

John Kantakouzenos was wealthy and talented and had forged a strong bond with the imperial heir in his youth. When the conflict between Andronikos II and Andronikos III escalated into civil war in 1321, John (as a staunch supporter of Andronikos III) was called on to play an active role, but Eirene settled in the country.[951] For several years, she and her husband did not have any offspring, perhaps due to their frequent separations. However, starting in 1325, Eirene gave birth to six children in succession: Matthew, who was later to become emperor (*1325),[952] Manuel (*around 1330),[953] Andronikos (*1334),[954] Maria,[955] Theodora, and Helene (*1333/4).[956] As the war progressed, Eirene probably spent much of her time helping her mother-in-law guard Didymoteichon and the family estates, which were considerable.[957]

The sources ignore Eirene's existence throughout the war and the postwar years, not mentioning her again until the beginning of the Second Civil War (1341–1347). During this time, she was probably focused on her children and had not yet become involved in the political life of the empire. It was just as well,

950 *Manuelis Philae Carmina Inedita*, 111, fn. 79.
951 *Kantakouzenos* I, 39 (I,8).
952 For details on Matthew's life, see the chapter on Eirene Palaiologina, daughter of Demetrios Palaiologos. For further information and literature, see *PLP*, n. 10983.
953 *PLP*, n. 10981.
954 *PLP*, n. 10954.
955 *PLP*, n. 16885.
956 *PLP*, n. 21365.
957 *Kantakouzenos* I, 28 (I,6), 52 (I,10). Nicol (1996A), 22.

Tab. 4: *A Selected Genealogy of the Kantakouzenos Dynasty. Based on Nicol (1968). See also ODB II, 1103 f.*



for politics would later bring her drama and adventure aplenty. While the future empress cared for her growing family, her husband fulfilled his official duties as *megas domestikos* (the general-in-chief of the armed forces), a position to which he had been promoted by Andronikos III. At this time, Eirene did not have her mother-in-law to help her as Theodora Kantakouzene was deeply engaged in her support of Anna Palaiologina (Anna of Savoy), the young empress of foreign origin, and preoccupied with court affairs.[958]

As one of the foremost families of the empire, the Kantakouzenes (see Tab. 4) cultivated their connections through careful marital politics. When the time came, John and Eirene secured prominent partners for their eldest children, Matthew and Maria. In 1341, Matthew married Eirene Palaiologina, the granddaughter of Andronikos II, and (sometime afterwards) Maria wedded Nikephoros II, the young despot of Epiros.

Eirene's first mission

Eirene's peaceful life ended with the unexpected death of Andronikos III in June 1341. The empire was left in the hands of his nine-year-old heir, John, with the late emperor's wife (Anna of Savoy), the patriarch (John XIV Kalekas), and John Kantakouzenos acting as regents. In the months that followed, the relationship

958 Theodora often advised Kantakouzenos and Andronikos III. John Kantakouzenos mentions, for example, that it was she who asked the seriously ill Andronikos III whether he wished his mother to govern the empire along with his wife should his illness prove fatal. *Kantakouzenos* II, 395 f. (III,64).

between the imperial widow and John Kantakouzenos gradually deteriorated, and a new military conflict loomed on the horizon. It was under these circumstances that Eirene undertook her first political mission in the fall of 1341. Five years earlier, Andronikos III had condemned her brothers, John and Manuel Asen, for high treason and interned them in the Monastery of Bera.[959] When the Second Civil War began, both parties sought to enlist these capable military leaders. The brothers, however, rejected the appeals of the emissaries as they feared that choosing sides could worsen their plight. Finally, Eirene herself went to Bera to reason with them.[960] According to Gregoras, she gave them a personal guarantee of safety, encouraged them, and returned to them part of their previously confiscated property. Soon afterwards, John and Manuel[961] joined the Kantakouzenos party at Didymoteichon.[962] As Eirene's brothers are known to have attended Eirene and her husband after the couple were proclaimed emperor and empress in October 1341,[963] the princess's mission must have taken place shortly before that date.

Ascension to power

As the conflict with Empress Anna continued, John Kantakouzenos decided to proclaim himself emperor (no doubt urged on by his troops, friends, and family members). The event took place in Didymoteichon on October 16, 1341.[964] In his memoirs, Kantakouzenos noted that the ceremony was performed in the presence of numerous relatives, noblemen, members of the senate, and soldiers and that both he and Eirene were dressed in golden robes. In the course of the ceremony, he received the red shoes worn by Byzantine emperors, one presented by his relatives and the other by Latin soldiers of noble origin, and 'crowned' himself with a special felt hat also worn by emperors. The names of Emperor John (VI) and Empress Eirene were then added to the imperial acclamations, following those of Empress Anna and Emperor John V.[965] After the ceremony, Kantakouzenos rode to the Church of St. George Palaiokastrites to worship and give thanks. Eirene's absence on this occasion is unlikely even though she would not have played an active role in the ceremony (at least the sources do not mention her). Her name

959 *Gregoras* II, 625 (XII,16). Gregoras mistakenly calls the monastery Abdera. For details, see *Van Dieten* III, 274, n. 126.
960 *Kantakouzenos* II, 161 f. (III,26). For Eirene's mission, see Melichar (2017), 119.
961 For John, see *PLP*, n. 1499, for Manuel, *PLP*, n. 1509.
962 *Gregoras* II, 624 f. (XII,16).
963 *Kantakouzenos* II, 155–160 (III,25), 166–173 (III,26 f.). *Gregoras* II, 610–612 (XII,11). *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* II, 252 f.
964 *Gregoras* II, 611 f. (XII,12). *Kantakouzenos* II, 165 f. (III,27). *Fatouros, Kantakouzenos* III, 446, n. 250. Nicol (1996A), 55.
965 *Gregoras* II, 611 f. (XII,12).

reappears in Kantakouzenos's account after his return to the palace[966] when he took his place by her side at a splendid reception. The couple feasted together, attended by Eirene's brothers and John Angelos, the emperor's cousin. As was customary on such occasions, the guests remained standing.[967] The following day, John and Eirene took off their golden clothing and donned white robes to mourn the death of Andronikos III.[968] According to the ceremonial book of *Pseudo-Kodinos*, an emperor was to wear white only upon the death of his mother, father, wife, son, or grandson who had already been proclaimed emperor.[969] Andronikos III did not fit any of these categories, but John and Eirene apparently wished to demonstrate by this unusual act their loyalty to the Palaiologan dynasty.

The Second Civil War (1341–1347)

The Second Civil War brought division not only within the Byzantine Empire but also within the Asen and Kantakouzenos families. While John and Manuel Asen joined the Kantakouzenes, their father allied himself with Empress Anna and the young John V.[970] Eirene's mother-in-law, Theodora, and John and Eirene's youngest son, Andronikos (who was only seven years old), also remained in the capital.[971] For once, Theodora was wrong in her estimation of another's character, relying on Anna's gratitude for past services. Unfortunately for her, Anna had a new counselor, a former protégé of John Kantakouzenos named Alexios Apokaukos, who was mentioned in the previous chapter. A man of low birth and base character (the sources are hardly kind to him in retrospect), he fed Anna's distrust of John Kantakouzenos and his family. Apokaukos, who regarded the mother of his chief enemy as dangerous, had both her and her young grandson imprisoned, and he ordered that Theodora's property be confiscated. The elderly woman, her strength depleted by cruel treatment and malnutrition, soon died in prison[972] (1342). Her grandson Andronikos remained a prisoner until the end of the war in 1347.

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966 Kantakouzenos mentions that he returned to the palace (εἰς τὰ βασίλεια) in his description (*Kantakouzenos* II, 166 (III,27).

967 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 380 f., 391 f.

968 *Kantakouzenos* II, 167 (III,27), III, 166 f. (IV,23). Gregoras claims that Kantakouzenos and his wife put on their mourning clothes on the third day after the proclamation. Kantakouzenos wanted to show his grief over the death of Andronikos III and the fate of his own mother as well as his concern for his allies who were living in poverty. *Gregoras* II, 612 (XII,12).

969 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 262, 264 (XI).

970 *Kantakouzenos* II, 114 (III,18), II, 185 (III,30).

971 *Kantakouzenos* II, 164 f. (III,26).

972 Theodora died in the same building where Andronikos II was imprisoned after his abdication. See *Gregoras* II, 617 (XII,13). *Kantakouzenos* II, 511 (III,83).

Governor of Didymoteichon

Having laid claim to the throne, John and Eirene wintered in Didymoteichon. On March 5, 1342, John Kantakouzenos departed on a new military campaign. He left Eirene behind along with their three daughters, their son-in-law (Nikephoros II of Epiros), and a cavalry contingent of a thousand men led by Manuel Tarchaneiotes and Manuel Asen (Eirene's brother),[973] who was appointed general-in-chief of the armed forces in Kantakouzenos's absence.[974] Even though husband and wife corresponded with one another intermittently throughout this difficult period, none of these letters have survived. John initially tried to enter Thessalonike, but when the imperial fleet arrived there first, he decided to seek the protection of the Serbian king, Stephan Uroš IV Dušan.[975] After John and Stephan signed an alliance against their common enemies in Constantinople (July 1342), John attempted to return to Didymoteichon; however, a number of adverse circumstances (an epidemic in his camp, news that Apokaukos had dispatched troops against him, the refusal of the inhabitants of Serres to surrender) prevented him from rejoining his family.

In his absence, Eirene was left in a vulnerable position both outside and inside the city walls. To protect herself from a possible siege or an attack by imperial troops, she concluded a peace treaty with the Bulgarian tsar, Ivan Alexander, at the end of 1342.[976] In spite of their agreement, the tsar attacked Byzantine territory and besieged Didymoteichon.[977] In this moment of pressing need, one of her husband's allies, Umur of Aydin,[978] arrived with a large army and a fleet of ships. When the Bulgarians fled, Eirene dispatched soldiers and officials to welcome Umur. She also sent along one hundred horses so that he and the leaders of his army would not have to march. Though the empress did not allow the Turkish troops to enter Didymoteichon, she did supply their camp with food.[979] Doukas reports that "Lady Kantakouzene welcomed and received him [Umur] magnanimously with bountiful provisions and all good things, so he stayed for three months waiting for

973 *Kantakouzenos* II, 195 (III, 32). Nicol (1996A), 62, 64. Gill (1985), 45 ff.

974 *Kantakouzenos* II, 195 f. (III,32). *Gregoras* II, 626 (XII,16), 628 (XII,16), 652 (XIII, 4).

975 For a report on Kantakouzenos's first stay in Serbia in 1342, see *Kantakouzenos* III, 260–277.

976 *Kantakouzenos* II, 336 f. (III,56).

977 *Gregoras* II, 648–653 (XIII,4). *Kantakouzenos* II, 338 f. (III,56). *Doukas*, 51–53 (VII,1 ff.).

978 An emirate located on the Aegean coast of Asia Minor.

979 *Kantakouzenos* II, 344 ff. (III,56). See also *Doukas*, 53. Gregoras claims that the empress repeatedly invited Umur to visit her (*Gregoras* II, 648 f. (XIII,4)) but that the invitation was refused. He also writes that Eirene offered Umur clothing and provisions, which were not accepted either (*Gregoras* II, 650 f. (XIII,4)). However, Gregoras's information may simply have been part of his construction of Umur as a 'noble savage.' Clearly, Umur could hardly have refused provisions for his large following, especially since the winter was particularly harsh that year (as Gregoras himself admits). Nicol (1996A), 66 f.

Kantakouzenos. (...) He concluded a treaty of peace and friendship, and Lady Kantakouzene, bestowing upon him many gifts, dismissed him."[980] Thankful that the Turks had frightened the Bulgarians away, Eirene must nevertheless have been relieved when Umur decided to go find Kantakouzenos himself.[981] The winter was severe that year, and feeding a large army in addition to her own people would have been a serious burden indeed.

Even inside the walls of Didymoteichon, Eirene had to remain on her guard. In 1342, Alexios Apokaukos attempted to win over the inhabitants of the city and force their surrender by spreading a false report that Kantakouzenos and his army had been captured near the fortress of Rentina.[982] Although representatives of the city unanimously refused to surrender, the empress and her brother began to doubt the loyalty of some and decided to test them by making them swear an oath of allegiance. Everyone complied.[983] To Eirene's great relief, a messenger soon arrived to inform her that her husband was still alive.[984]

In the winter of 1343–1344, John made a brief visit to Didymoteichon. The empress welcomed him and his soldiers and took care of them throughout the winter. As Gregoras noted, John praised Eirene for the

> (...) perseverance with which she bore the long and manifold difficulties (...), for her courage, which she had shown, through advice and all manner of gifts and friendly words, motivated the officers as well as the soldiers and encouraged them to yet greater resistance. Sometimes she flattered, sometimes she reprimanded, sometimes she faced the manifold and quick changes in the power relations of the state with acute intelligence as she wisely countered the promises and feigned ruses by which Byzantium in different times and ways secretly manipulated soldiers and leaders by which natures, which were in danger of falling, were splendidly raised again. Her energy and intelligence produced an amazing admiration in Satrap Amur when he heard that it was she who maintained the steadfastness and perseverance of the army of Didymoteichon and thus secured the power position of the emperor.[985]

After her husband's departure for Serbia, Eirene governed Didymoteichon for another year. The sources do not tell us much about this time except that on one occasion Eirene, who felt that the inhabitants' loyalty was waning, invited the city's representatives to the palace, where she proceeded to encourage the men not to lose hope and described vividly the rewards John would bestow on them on his return.[986] In the middle of 1345, Eirene received the news that Alexios Apokaukos

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980 *Doukas*, 53 (VII,2).
981 *Kantakouzenos* II, 345 (III,56). Umur's search was unsuccessful. Eventually, he abandoned it and returned home.
982 *Kantakouzenos* II, 277 (III,45).
983 *Kantakouzenos* II, 280 f. (III,46).
984 *Kantakouzenos* II, 281–286 (III,46 f.).
985 *Gregoras* II, 693 f. (XIV,1).
986 *Kantakouzenos* II, 336 f. (III,56).

had been murdered in Constantinople and apprised her husband of the report that his bitterest enemy was dead.[987]

Despite her exceptional strength and courage, these years could not have been easy ones for the empress. In essence, Eirene was a prisoner since she was unable to leave Didymoteichon. Added to her confinement were the heavy emotional burdens she was forced to carry. She was afraid for her husband and her two sons who were in Serbia. She also worried about her youngest son, Andronikos, who was being held prisoner by Apokaukos in Constantinople. Eirene's insecurity and fears are recorded in only the briefest of episodes in the chronicles. Once, when she had received no news for a long time, Eirene sent Manuel Tarchaneiotes to find her husband.[988] Staying off the open roads, the messenger managed to find his way to Serbia and came back with information that the emperor was well.[989]

As her position required a great deal of circumspection, Eirene probably had a network of informants outside the city walls. Their information proved invaluable when she heard that the emperor was approaching the besieged Didymoteichon and she was able to warn him by letter not to continue without a large army,[990] an action which may have prevented the emperor from being killed or taken prisoner. On another occasion, Eirene received support from the archbishop of Didymoteichon, who apprised her of the fact that John was already in Chalkidike.[991]

Coronation in Adrianople

John Kantakouzenos returned to Didymoteichon in 1345 after the Serbian tsar, Stephan Uroš IV Dušan, abjured their previous peace treaties and dissolved their agreements.[992] In the spring of the following year, his former ally had himself crowned emperor 'of the Serbs and the Romans,'[993] an event which signaled a pending invasion and war with Byzantium. The Serbian coronation, along with the continued urging of relatives and army officials, provided the persuasion necessary to convince John to take the crown. In April 1346, Eirene left Didymoteichon for Adrianople where John Kantakouzenos was crowned emperor by Lazaros, the patriarch of Jerusalem.[994] Afterwards, John crowned Eirene with his own hands 'in the customary fashion.'[995] Their coronation took place on the Orthodox feast of Constantine and Helene (May 21), but unlike the ceremonies that surrounded his

987 *Kantakouzenos* II, 546 (III,88).
988 *Gregoras* II, 652 f. (XIII,4).
989 *Gregoras* II, 652 f. (XIII,4).
990 *Kantakouzenos* II, 333 (III,55)
991 *Kantakouzenos* II, 401 f. (III,65).
992 *Kantakouzenos* II, 375 (III,61).
993 This coronation took place in Skopje on April 16, 1346 (Easter Sunday).
994 On the importance of the Orthodox Church in legitimizing the position of John VI Kantakouzenos, see Charanis (1940–1941A), 62 f.
995 *Kantakouzenos* II, 564 (III,92). Nicol (1996A), 75.

proclamation in 1341, the emperor-historian had very little to say about his first coronation.

The wedding of Eirene's daughter Theodora

The final phase of the Second Civil War took place in the months following the coronation. To secure vitally needed military support, John VI agreed to marry his daughter Theodora to the Ottoman Sultan Orhan I.[996] Though the match could hardly have pleased the empress, Eirene and her other daughters traveled to Selymbria together with Theodora, no doubt so that they could enjoy extra time with her and provide moral support for the bride-to-be. On their arrival, the imperial family was met by Orhan's legates and a regiment of soldiers, who had come with a large fleet to escort Theodora to her new husband.[997] On the night of the wedding, Kantakouzenos staged a *prokypsis* for his daughter.[998] He ordered a wooden stage to be built and covered with silk curtains. Standing on this tribune dressed in her finery, Theodora was revealed to the people. The scene was lit by lamps held by eunuchs and was accompanied by music and panegyrics recited in honor of the bride.[999] Kantakouzenos does not explain his reasons for staging this event which may have been part of the customary ceremonies accompanying the marriage of an imperial daughter.[1000] Beside Byzantine tradition, he may have also wished to give Theodora a moment of public admiration and celebration before she entered a culture in which women were kept hidden from sight. After the *prokypsis*, the emperor hosted the Greek and Turkish noblemen for several days. When the feasting was over, Theodora said good-bye to her parents and sisters and sailed to her bridegroom. It must have been a comfort to her mother that she maintained her Christian faith and supported fellow Christians in the sultan's dominions.[1001] At least such was the historical report set down by her father.

Coronation in Constantinople

Towards the end of 1346, Empress Anna still refused to negotiate with her adversaries even though the number of Kantakouzenos sympathizers in Constantinople

996 *Kantakouzenos* II, 585 ff. (III,95). For an interesting study on this marriage, see Bryer (1981). Nicol (1996A), 77 f.

997 See also Nicol (1996A), 77 f.

998 A special observance regularly performed by the emperor and (possibly) his son at Christmas and Epiphany. Evidence also exists for the *prokypsis* of empresses on the occasion of their wedding. For a detailed explanation and historical analysis of this ceremony, see *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 401–413, especially 405 f.

999 *Kantakouzenos* II, 564 (III,92), 587–589 (III,95). For a translation of this text, see *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 406. For further details, see also Bryer (1981). Nicol (1996), 74.

1000 For details, see *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 405f.

1001 *Kantakouzenos* II, 588 f. (III,95).

was steadily increasing. They had even promised to open the Golden Gate to the Kantakouzenos soldiers on a fixed day and at a set time. Still in Thessaly, John VI began to make preparations for his conquest. At the end of January 1347, Anna decided to remove Patriarch John Kalekas from office and from the regency. He was deposed on the night of February 2 by a synod the empress had convened for this purpose. That same night, Kantakouzenos presented himself at the Golden Gate, and he and his men were admitted into the city. Fearing for the lives of her family, Anna was determined to fight to the end, which made negotiations extremely difficult; however, the two parties finally reached an agreement. One of the conditions concerned the position of the two rulers: John Kantakouzenos would become the senior emperor of John V Palaiologos for a period of ten years, after which the two emperors would rule as equals. It was further agreed that the young emperor would marry Kantakouzenos's youngest daughter, Helene.[1002]

The sources have little to say about Eirene's whereabouts and actions from the summer of 1346 until the winter of 1347. Apparently, she was not with John VI while he was seeking a compromise with Anna of Savoy. As Nikephoros Gregoras noted, "When the emperor Kantakouzenos entered the palace, there was no place suitable for him to reside, even without the presence of his wife, who was still living in Didymoteichon."[1003] Nevertheless, when John summoned his wife and daughters[1004] to Constantinople a few months later, his message found them in Adrianople. On their arrival in the capital, Eirene, Maria, and Helene were welcomed by the two emperors and Empress Anna as well as the court officials, who came to give the imperial bride the customary greeting outside the city near the Monastery of the Theotokos tes Peges. There, a festive proclamation of Helene as the new empress took place, and she received the imperial insignia in Eirene's presence.[1005]

Although John VI did not remove John V from power, he still felt the need to reinforce his own position.[1006] To prevent the possibility of doubts arising regarding the validity of his coronation, he decided to stage a new coronation in the capital.[1007] On May 21, 1347,[1008] a year to the day after their first coronation,

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1002 *Kantakouzenos* II, 604–615 (III,99 f.). *Gregoras* II, 773–779 (XV,8). *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* II, 268–270. Nicol (1996), 80 f. On the reign of John VI, see Nicol (1972B), 217–261.

1003 *Gregoras* II, 783 f. (XV,9).

1004 The text does not say which princess(es) accompanied Eirene and the imperial bride to the Byzantine capital. As Theodora had only recently married, it is probable that only the eldest, Maria, traveled with her mother and sister to Constantinople.

1005 *Kantakouzenos* III, 11 (IV,1).

1006 *Kantakouzenos* III, 29 (IV,4). Gregoras believed that it was the Palamites who urged the emperor to have himself crowned a second time (*Gregoras* II, 787 f. (XV,11)).

1007 *Kantakouzenos* III, 29 (IV,4). (Trans.) *Miller, Kantakouzenos*, 166.

1008 *Kantakouzenos* III, 29 (IV,4). Kantakouzenos himself placed his coronation to May 13. For a persuasive argument in favor of May 21, see *Van Dieten*, 378–380, n. 487. Nicol (1996A), 87.

John and Eirene were crowned in the Theotokos Blachernitissa Church in Constantinople:

> That same spring, on the thirteenth of May, the emperor Cantacuzenus was crowned by the patriarch Isidore in the temple of the Mother of God at Blacherns[1009] in the presence of the empress Anna and the emperor John, Cantacuzenus’s son-in-law. (. . .) Then the emperor himself crowned the empress according to custom. Returning to the palace, they carried out the rounds of drinking, the toasts of friendship, and all other things, which the emperor knew would make the feast brilliant.[1010]

It seems the feast was not as brilliant as Kantakouzenos might have wished. Nikephoros Gregoras noted that it was poor and lacking in splendor, pointing out that the Blacherns Church of the Theotokos was too small to accommodate the podium for the thrones, the crowd of guests invited to witness the event, and the servants, singers, and clergy necessary to facilitate the ceremony. The historian, who may have been present, reports that there were five thrones, one for each of the two emperors (John VI and John V) and three empresses (Eirene, Anna, and Helene). The ceremony ended at around four in the afternoon. Afterward, the imperial family, still wearing their coronation robes, rode back to the palace. There they stood on a high tribune to show themselves to the people before proceeding to the reception. According to Gregoras, the feast, too, was unworthy of the occasion. The historian noted that there were no plates or chalices of gold or silver but only of brass and porcelain. Similarly unremarkable were the jewels worn by the emperors and empresses: they were mostly from gilded leather and glass and were embellished with only a few genuine pearls and precious stones.[1011] A week after her coronation, Eirene most likely participated in the wedding and coronation of her daughter Helene, which also took place in the Theotokos Blachernitissa (May 28).[1012]

Eirene’s negotiations with her son Matthew

After proclaiming himself emperor and again after his first coronation, John Kantakouzenos had refused to make his son Matthew his co-emperor,[1013] a decision he did not reconsider even after his victorious entry into Constantinople in February 1347. The fact that John V remained emperor and was expected to

1009 The Church of Hagia Sophia had been damaged in the earthquake of 1346 and had not yet been repaired.

1010 *Kantakouzenos* III, 29 (IV,4). (Trans.) *Miller, Kantakouzenos*, 165 f. See also Nicol (1972B), 223.

1011 *Gregoras* II, 787–791 (XV,11).

1012 *Kantakouzenos* III, 29 (IV,4). For further details, see the chapter on Helene Palaiologina.

1013 *Kantakouzenos* II, 565 (III,92).

succeed John VI could hardly have pleased Matthew, who was older than John and already had some military experience.[1014] Encouraged by his uncle (John Asen),[1015] Matthew surrounded himself with those who wished the Kantakouzenos dynasty to occupy the Byzantine throne permanently and entered into an open rebellion against John V. In the fall of 1347 in an attempt to avert the pending conflict, Empress Eirene set off to reason with her son at the request of her husband.[1016]

Nikephoros Gregoras recorded the details of this meeting in his chronicle. The account should not be dismissed as fiction in its entirety, for Gregoras was an intimate friend of the Kantakouzenos family despite his later disagreement with John VI over the Palamite controversy. The empress may have related the details of the encounter to the historian in the course of one of Gregoras's visits. The chronicler reports that when Eirene met with Matthew in Orestias, he obediently performed the *proskynesis* and promised to obey her in everything.[1017] After a long and lofty prologue about the advantages and joys of a simpler life over the pomp and riches of the imperial house,[1018] the empress warned her son against his advisers, reminded him of his parents' love, and explained that she had come to save him from falling into misfortune.[1019] She then explained that even though the empire had shrunk considerably and his parents' fortune had disappeared in the struggles of the civil war, the soldiers that wished to continue fighting were only motivated by their desire to increase their share of the spoils. The empress ended her speech by promising that if her son agreed to submit to his father, John VI would forgive him and supply all his needs. According to Gregoras, Matthew accepted the offer without hesitation.[1020] The account of John Kantakouzenos adds further information regarding Eirene's mission. Apparently, she also rebuked her brothers, the instigators of Matthew's insubordination, and threatened them with terrible punishments if they should repeat their evil counsels.[1021] Though Eirene's mission

1014 He was with his father during the civil war.

1015 Nikephoros Gregoras reveals the bitterness of the Kantakouzenists over John VI's decision not to replace John V with his own son and initiate the rise of the Kantakouzene dynasty. *Gregoras* II, 798–804 (XVI,2).

1016 *Gregoras* III, 144 (XXVII,22). *Van Dieten* III, 398, n. 554. For a detailed overview of Matthew's life, see Nicol (1968), 110–122. See also Nicol (1972B), 245. For the passage related to Eirene's first embassy, see *ibid.*, 110–11. Nicol (1996A), 90 f. See also Dabrowska (2012), 58 f. Nicol (1996A), 88 f. Melichar (2017), 119 f.

1017 *Gregoras* II, 798–804 (XVI,2). See also Nicol (1996), 75 f.

1018 *Gregoras* II, 805–808 (XVI,3).

1019 *Gregoras* II, 808–811 (XVI,3).

1020 *Gregoras* II, 811 f. (XVI,3).

1021 For the whole of Eirene's mission as described by her husband, see *Kantakouzenos* III, 47 ff. (IV,7 f.). Kantakouzenos mentions his wife's first embassy once more just before describing Eirene's second journey, this time to meet with her son-in-law. The brief note, however, does not offer new details relevant to the present study. *Kantakouzenos* III, 239–241 (IV, 32 f.). Muratore (1906), 228.

was a success, she was not allowed to enjoy it. On her return to Constantinople, she learned that her youngest son, who had only recently been released from his long imprisonment, had died of the plague.[1022]

Eirene and the Palamite controversy

In the fall of 1347, Eirene became involved in the politics of the church. The chapter on Anna of Savoy introduced the circumstances of the hesychast (or Palamite) controversy, which was essentially "the method of monastic prayer and contemplation designed to achieve communion with God through interior quietude."[1023] This issue strongly impacted the thinking and culture of late Byzantium. Caught up in the conflict, Nikephoros Gregoras turned to Empress Eirene for support at a time when John VI was in Didymoteichon, attempting to ease tensions in the wake of Matthew's rebellion. As Gregoras reasoned with Eirene, who was still grief-stricken over the death of her son (an event which Gregoras interpreted as a sign of God's wrath against the heretical teaching of the Palamites), he apparently managed to engage her as a supporter of the anti-Palamite party. With her characteristic passion and energy, Eirene defended its interests very effectively, so much so that the patriarch and the Palamites had to write to John VI and request his immediate return to Constantinople to protect their cause.[1024] On his return, the emperor evidently persuaded his wife, possibly with the aid of Palamite bishops,[1025] that the hesychast teachings did indeed correspond with Orthodox doctrine, for the sources contain no further evidence that she continued to promote the anti-hesychast view.

Maria Light Mass

Contemporary chronicles do not present Eirene as someone involved in scholarly or literary patronage in the style of Empress Theodora Palaiologina. She did attempt to make one contribution of this kind, however, when she decided to establish a special celebration of the Mother of God on the anniversary of the day her husband had entered Constantinople (February 2, 1347, the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin). *De cerimoniis* mentions that, in the middle Byzantine period, the meeting of the infant Jesus and Simeon was celebrated in the Blacherns Palace on this day.[1026] It is not clear whether some vestige of the earlier celebration had survived into the late Byzantine period, something that Eirene wished to enhance, or whether she was attempting to establish a new tradition. In any

1022 *Gregoras* II, 825 f. (XVI,5). Nicol (1996A), 93.
1023 *ODB* II, 923.
1024 *Gregoras* II, 825 f. (XVI,5), III, 96–99 (XXVI, 28–32).
1025 *Gregoras* II, 826 f. (XVI,5).
1026 *De cerimoniis*, 759 (II,52). *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 759. Taft (1998), 47.

case, in February 1348, she organized an event known as the Maria Light Mass, during which Nikephoros Gregoras[1027] and other scholars gave festive speeches.[1028] The emperor, it seems, was not pleased with the feast and reproached Eirene, complaining that the celebration overshadowed his own efforts and success. The event was not repeated.[1029]

Governor of Constantinople

Soon after his accession to power, John VI's followers attempted to persuade him to exclude Empress Anna and John V from the government. When he refused, they approached Eirene:

> (...) they despaired of persuading him [the emperor] and went to the empress Irene since they thought that they could prevail upon her and persuade her to join with them as though they were planning something beneficial. When the empress answered in a similar manner or even more severely and commanded them to stop attempting to entangle the Romans once again in great misfortunes, some of them, as though ashamed by her refutations quieted down completely.[1030]

This is one of the rare passages where John openly reveals the strong character of his wife. The short text indicates that Eirene was adamantly opposed to a new war and was able to silence those who were attempting to ignite one. The fact that John's followers went to Eirene was not without precedent, but the sources do not often mention such petitions for intervention being made to a late Byzantine empress. The incident further strengthens the image of the imperial couple as a team: everyone was aware of the fact, so the courtiers did not go to Eirene because it was the standard approach in such situations but because they were convinced that she had the ability to effectively plead their case to her husband.

With the substantial support of the aristocrats and the rich merchants of Constantinople, John VI was able to build a new fleet following his coronation and so decrease Byzantine dependence on Italian shipping and bolster the defenses of the capital. In mid-August 1348, Eirene became the governor (*epitropos*) of Constantinople in the absence of the emperor, who lay ill in Didymoteichon. The Latins of Galata, unhappy over the construction of a new imperial fleet, chose this moment to pick a quarrel with a group of Byzantine fishermen and subsequently murdered them. Galata (Pera) then prepared itself for war but decided to try to negotiate with the Byzantines first. Several days later, a Latin delegation appeared

1027 *Gregoras* III, 108 (XXVI,42).

1028 There were apparently several festivities during which Byzantine scholars were wont to present imperial panegyrics to their rulers, including (especially) the Epiphany (the Feast of Lights, January 6). For details, see Dennis (1997), 136.

1029 *Westerink, Dankrede*, 259–271. See also Beyer (1978), 137.

1030 *Miller, Kantakouzenos*, 82 f. (edited text), 182 f. (trans.).

before the empress. They asked her forgiveness for the violence, requested confirmation of existing treaties, and demanded that the Byzantines stop working on their new fleet. Uncertain how to proceed, Eirene wrote to the emperor. As the matter was urgent, she also gathered the imperial council of noblemen and officials in the palace on the following day and asked for their advice as well. They unanimously counselled her to fight.[1031]

The Latins were well prepared for this eventuality. They seized the opportunity to destroy Byzantine ships, including the new fleet, and burn houses and workshops along the coast. They also attacked the city, blockaded the harbors, and plundered ships bringing provisions. Eirene quickly mustered her defense. She put her son Manuel in charge of the soldiers left behind in Constantinople and ordered him to encourage the Byzantines to defend the city. Gregoras reports that the empress personally took part in the military preparations: Eirene allegedly "positioned the heavily armed soldiers, oversaw the placement of defense machines on the towers, and with greatest zeal took care of the throwing machines (. . .)."[1032] In the meantime, she exhorted the officials and noblemen gathered in the palace to stand firm. The conflict continued throughout September and the citizens of Constantinople mounted a skillful defense of their city under Eirene's guidance.[1033] The emperor was able to provide military support, and the resistance continued. Eirene sent her son out to attack the enemy while she personally encouraged the noblemen to persevere in the struggle[1034] until her husband could return to take charge of the situation, which happened at the beginning of October.

Mission to her son-in-law

The peace between Matthew Kantakouzenos and John Palaiologos, concluded in the fall of 1347, remained fragile. When Matthew had to give up part of his dominions to his brother-in-law in 1352,[1035] he was, quite understandably, not pleased. Gregoras paints a vivid image of Eirene's embassy to John in the spring of 1352.[1036] She departed for Didymoteichon in the company of two bishops and a certain Angelos,[1037] who were to serve as witnesses. There she attempted to persuade John to give his brother-in-law the region from Orestias to Bizye along with the surrounding towns and villages. John himself would rule the area from

1031 Nicol (1996A), 97.
1032 *Gregoras* II, 850 (XVII,3).
1033 *Gregoras* II, 850 f. (XVII,3).
1034 *Gregoras* II, 845–854 (XVII,1 ff.).
1035 For the circumstances of John V's move from his domain in Thessalonike, see the above biographical chapter on Anna of Savoy.
1036 *Gregoras* III, 144 (XXVII,22), 152–171 (XXVII,31–54).
1037 *Gregoras* III, 152 (XXVII,31). Nicol (1996A), 119. Melichar (2017), 122.

Didymoteichon to Thessalonike while her husband, John VI, would govern the rest of the Byzantine territories, including Constantinople, until the end of his life. The empress also called on her son-in-law to trust John VI,[1038] something he refused to do, reminding her instead of the insults, traps, and betrayals he had already suffered at the hands of his father-in-law.[1039] Even Eirene's persuasive abilities could not save the situation, and she had to return to Constantinople in haste. A more modest account of the meeting is offered by Kantakouzenos, who claims the initiative for the mission.[1040]

The downfall of the Kantakouzenos dynasty

As the conflicts between Matthew and John V continued unabated, the Palaiologan emperor was eventually forced to live with his family in semi-exile on the island of Tenedos. In March 1353, John V left the island and attempted to seize Constantinople in a surprise attack. His endeavor failed, largely due to the vigilance of his mother-in-law, who swiftly organized the defense of the city:

> But Empress Eirene rose immediately, with greater strength than that which is usually possessed by women, decided what was to be done, and secured quickly the entrances on all sides. She also took prompt measures to cross the plans of the suspected persons, who were still present in Byzantion [Constantinople] and in three days forced him [John V Palaiologos] to retreat.[1041]

Realizing that he had missed his chance, John returned to Tenedos.[1042] The following years saw further military clashes between John V and the Kantakouzenos family. After Matthew and John VI allowed Turkish soldiers to terrorize the Thracian towns that supported their opponent, popular opinion turned increasingly in favor of John V. Matthew Kantakouzenos was crowned emperor in February 1354,[1043] but it proved too late to introduce a new dynasty on the Byzantine throne. One month later, the Turks took Gallipolis, and this time they settled on European soil. The public's perception of John Kantakouzenos as someone who could not negotiate with the Turks or protect the empire from invasion was set, and the damage to his reputation was irreversible.

In November 1354, John V entered Constantinople victoriously, not unlike his father-in-law seven years earlier. After several days of negotiations, the two parties

1038 *Gregoras* III, 153 f. (XXVII,32).
1039 *Gregoras* III, 162–171 (XXVII,42–55).
1040 *Kantakouzenos* III, 239 (IV,32): "μετὰ μικρὸν δὲ καὶ τὴν βασιλίδα Εἰρήνην τὴν γαμετὴν ἐκέλευεν εἰς Διδυμότειχον ἀφικομένην, διαλλάτειν τὸν υἱὸν γαμβρῷ τῷ βασιλεῖ." Also see *Kantakouzenos* III, 239 ff. (IV,32).
1041 *Gregoras* III, 188 (XVIII,18). Muratore (1906), 238 f.
1042 *Gregoras* III, 178–188 (XXVIII,3–19). *Kantakouzenos* III, 255 (IV,35).
1043 *Kantakouzenos* III, 269 f. (IV,37). *Gregoras* III, 188 f. (XXVIII,18 f.). Nicol (1968), 81 f.

assumed joint rule.[1044] The sources do not tell us much about Eirene's movements or actions at the time. Initially, the Kantakouzenos family remained in the imperial palace of Blacherns while John V took up residence in the Eagle House.[1045] As the days passed, it became clear that the situation was untenable. Kantakouzenos consulted his wife and shared with her his intention to relinquish control of the empire to his son-in-law.[1046]

As the people gathered in the streets in support of John V, John VI announced his decision to abdicate (December 10).[1047] He took off his imperial insignia and became a monk (even though he remained active in public life).[1048] Known as monk Joasaph, he established himself in the Mangana Monastery. On the following day, Eirene donned her habit, left the imperial palace, and entered the Convent of Kyra Martha[1049] (where her mother-in-law Theodora was buried) as the nun Eugenia.[1050] Despite speculations on the part of historians, she probably did not reproach her husband for his decision, which had prevented a new and bloody conflict from erupting.[1051] In embracing their new lives, the imperial couple did not divest themselves of all their worldly possessions and comforts. Gregoras somewhat maliciously noted that the emperor and empress did not bring only what they needed into their monastic residences but took along their riches and treasures as well.[1052]

1044 According to the agreement of 1347, John VI was to remain senior emperor until 1357. The successful *coup d'état* organized by John V shortened this period. Still, it appears as though the idea of a joint reign involving John V and John VI, two very different personalities with a history of mutual injuries and betrayals, was quickly abandoned by the senior emperor.

1045 *Kantakouzenos* III, 304 (IV,41): "ἐν οἰκίᾳ τινὶ ἑτέρᾳ τῶν περιφανῶν Ἀετὸν προσαγορευομένῃ."

1046 *Katankouzenos* III, 305 (IV,41). For further details on the abdication of the imperial couple, see Maksimović (1966), 131–140. Nicol (1996A), 128.

1047 Maksimović placed the abdication to November 25. See Maksimović (1966), 136, 189.

1048 For further details on John's abdication, see Nicol (1967). Nicol (1972B), 253. On Kantakouzenos's role in public life after his abdication, see Maksimović (1966).

1049 For details on this convent, see Kidonopoulos (1994), 51–53.

1050 *Kantakouzenos* III, 106 (IV,16). *Gregoras* III, 243 f. (XXIX,30). *Kantakouzenos* III, 307 (IV,42). For a testimony as to her choice of a monastic name, see Politis (1958), 274. For the dating of Eirene's entry into the convent, see Failler (1976), 123. The decision of the imperial couple to take their vows was not precipitate. John and Eirene had apparently begun to consider this option as early as 1349 when Eirene decided to enter the Convent of Kyra Martha, to which Kantakouzenos apparently held hereditary rights (*Kantakouzenos* III, 106 f. (IV,16)). For a chronology of events, see Failler (1976). Muratore (1906), 242. Nicol (1996A), 133.

1051 Valentin Parisot (Parisot (1845), 298) suggested that the empress did not agree with her husband's decision to take monastic vows and maintained that Eirene was sour and sarcastic, commenting the plan with the following words: "If I had guarded Didymoteichon as you have guarded Constantinople, we should have said our farewells twelve years ago." See also Nicol (1996), 79.

1052 *Gregoras* III, 243 (XXIX,30).

The Zeianos plot

In 1355, the conflict between John V and his brother-in-law intensified once again. Matthew's wife and children were seized and sent to Tenedos;[1053] only his eldest daughter, Theodora, who was living with her grandmother Eirene in the convent at the time,[1054] remained free. Matthew was later captured by the Serbians and sold to John V, who nobly prevented the Serbs from blinding his brother-in-law. He then sent Matthew to join his family in custody on Tenedos.[1055] After his imprisonment (1356–7), a certain Zeianos, a member of the Kantakouzenos household, approached Eirene, wishing to involve her in a plot to free her son and reestablish him as emperor. His plan involved the capture of the empress's daughter, Helene Palaiologina, and her children, whose freedom would then be contingent upon the release of Matthew and his family. With her innate decisiveness, the empress-nun emphatically rejected the idea of endangering her daughter's family and opening a path to more civil unrest.[1056] Eirene was clearly committed to maintaining peace in an empire so depleted by war. Though Matthew was admittedly her favorite child, it seems in keeping with her opinions and character that she used her influence with him to persuade him to surrender his hopes for the throne. She was also present for Matthew's official resignation, which took place at Epibatai in December 1357.[1057]

In 1356, Eirene's daughter Maria, the wife of Nikephoros II of Epiros, returned briefly to Constantinople. When her husband left on a military campaign, she stayed behind in the city of Ainos. Soon afterwards, Limpidarios, an admiral in her husband's forces, betrayed Nikephoros and besieged Ainos. Maria was ultimately allowed to leave the city and found refuge at the court of her sister Helene and John V. A short time later, she chose to rejoin her husband, who was considering repudiating her in favor of a Serbian princess. He put Maria under lock and key in Arta, but with the help of her brother Manuel, she was able to escape to the Peloponnese.

The journey to the Peloponnese

In 1359, the widowed Maria returned to Constantinople and joined her mother in the Convent of Kyra Martha.[1058] Two years later, the empress's son Matthew

1053 Nicol (1972B), 257.
1054 *Kantakouzenos* III, 331 (IV,45).
1055 *Kantakouzenos* III, 314 f. (IV,43), 319–340 (IV,44 ff.). *Gregoras* III, 503 f. (XXXVI, 5), 564–566 (XXXVII, 64–69).
1056 *Kantakouzenos* III, 341–345 (IV,47).
1057 *Kantakouzenos* III, 345–360 (IV,47 ff.). Muratore (1906), 243 (Muratore places the abdication to 1358). *MM* I, 448 ff. Oikonomides (1975), 114.
1058 *Kantakouzenos* III, 319 (IV,44). Nicol (1968), 130–133.

decided to move to the Morea (Peloponnese), which was governed at the time by his brother Manuel.[1059] Manuel had already proven his abilities while governing Beroia (1343–1347) and Constantinople (1348–1349) and was naturally concerned that his brother might attempt to assume his currently successful administration of the Morea. Sensing the possibility of a conflict between their sons, Eirene-Eugenia and John-Joasaph accompanied Matthew on his journey. Matthew settled peacefully at Mistra and did not interfere with his brother's government of the region. Having seen her task through, the empress-nun returned to Constantinople in 1362 or at the beginning of the following year.[1060]

On her arrival, she was welcomed by her middle daughter, Theodora, who had returned to Byzantium after the death of her husband, Orhan I.[1061] Unlike her mother (and, eventually, both sisters) she decided not to take her vows. Having spent much of her life confined to a harem, she must have been thankful to finally be free and gladly accepted her sister's invitation to move into the Blacherns Palace.[1062]

Death

The date of Eirene's death is unknown. It presumably occurred after March 1363, when her name appears for the last time in the written sources, and before 1379, when Andronikos IV abducted her husband and daughters and took them as hostages to Galata.[1063] Had Eirene been alive at the time, she would certainly have been forced to join her family. Though no source refers to her funeral or the place where she was buried, it is likely that she was laid to rest in the Nunnery of Kyra Martha, where she spent the years following her abdication. As she had come to accept the Palamite teachings, she remained an Orthodox empress, and her name was entered into the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* as "Eirene the nun Eugenia."[1064]

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Even though Anna of Savoy often seems to overshadow Eirene, this perception of their relative importance is perhaps unjust. Wise and decisive in her political

1059 *Kantakouzenos* III, 358 (IV,49).

1060 *Kantakouzenos* III, 358 (IV,49). In April 1363, Eirene was present at the audience of the ambassadors from Trebizond.

1061 *Kantakouzenos* II, 585–589 (III,95). Bryer (1981), 480.

1062 *Kydones* II, 103–110, n. 222. Nicol (1996), 157 f. Dennis (1960), 41. When Andronikos IV took his mother hostage in 1379 and dragged her to Galata, he also forced his aunts (Maria and Theodora) and his grandfather (John-Joasaph) to accompany him in his flight.

1063 For details, see Nicol (1968), 91 (n. 137), 107. Nicol (1972B), 249 f.

1064 *Gouillard, Synodikon*, 103. Her monastic name is confirmed by other manuscripts as well. See Politis (1958), 274.

moves and respected by the other members of the imperial family, Eirene had little opportunity to govern. However, with what time she had, she was able to save her husband's throne more than once. If she had not successfully defended Didymoteichon against the imperial troops and the Bulgarian army for more than four years and if she had not repeatedly mounted a timely defense of the capital, the history books might have had little to say about John VI Kantakouzenos. It is paradoxical that a man who did not have a very high opinion of "female nature"[1065] should have been so frequently rescued by his wife.

1065 *Kantakouzenos* III, 47 (IV,7).

VIII Helene Palaiologina: Caught Between Fate and Family

(1347–1396)

You sighed at the sight of the fate of the ones and the others and you pitied equally the winners and the losers. (…) You would have to, in reality, betray the ones or the others while according to justice you owed them all the same love.[1066]

Demetrios Kydones

Therefore, one must not be persuaded by Sophocles who has called silence the only ornament for women to wear and one must consider that the honors that come from literature have been given to them also, when they do not deal in gossip but practice the eloquence of the poets and prose writers. For then all men give up criticizing, they rejoice and stamp their feet, preferring the ringing sound of a woman's words to conventional silence.[1067]

Demetrios Kydones

Early years

When the First Civil War ended in 1328, Andronikos III replaced his elderly grandfather, Andronikos II, as emperor. The young man was eager to make political changes and stem the decline of the Byzantine Empire.[1068] His closest associate, who had lent him both financial and military support in the long campaigns of the war (1321–1328), was the commander-in-chief of the imperial armies (*megas domestikos*), John Kantakouzenos. Sometime during the relatively peaceful interwar years of 1333/4,[1069] John's wife gave birth to their third daughter,

1066 Kianka (1992), 162.
1067 Kianka (1992), 156, n. 389.
1068 For details on the reign of Andronikos III, see Bosch (1965). Nicol (1972B), 172–190.
1069 Scholars disagree on the year of Helene's birth. Nicol claims that she was born in April 1333 (Nicol (1968), 135) while *PLP* suggests that she was born in the second half of 1334 (*PLP*, n. 21365). According to the sources, Helene was two years younger than her husband, who was born on June 18, 1332 (*Gregoras* II, 791 (XV,11). *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* II, 242). Doukas informs us that she was thirteen years old at the time of her marriage (*Doukas*, 65 (X,4)). If this information is correct, since she married at the end of May 1347, she must have been born before the end of May 1334. April 1333,

Helene, who may have been named after the saintly mother of the emperor Constantine.[1070]

By reading between the lines, it is possible to gain some insight into the early life of the future empress through the historical writings of her father. As a young child, Helene lived with her family in Constantinople, where her father held a high post at the imperial court. When Andronikos III died and the Second Civil War (1341–1347)[1071] broke out, Helene moved with her mother and sisters to the city of Didymoteichon, which was the center of a large family estate.[1072] It was to become her home for the next five years. On October 16, 1341, she saw her father proclaimed emperor. This event was followed by his prolonged absence, the Bulgarian siege, and the propitious arrival of her father's Turkish ally, Umur of Aydin. In her formative years, Helene watched as her mother made prompt decisions to defend Didymoteichon against the Bulgarians, the troops of Empress Anna,[1073] and potential Palaiologan collaborators inside the city walls. Hunger was another enemy that had to be faced and was ever present in the severe winters of 1342 and 1343. As her later life demonstrates, these valuable lessons were certainly not lost on this spirited, bright young girl. Though the sources offer no information regarding Helene's education, the treatises later dedicated to her by eminent Byzantine scholars indicate that she was interested in rhetoric and logic as well as the natural sciences, implying that she received a solid classical education at some point in her life. It is not unlikely that she commenced her studies during her long confinement in Didymoteichon (1341–1346).

The family's fortunes improved after John Kantakouzenos returned from Serbia for good and his military operations became increasingly successful (1345). Though the sources do not specifically mention her presence, Helene most likely participated in her parents' first coronation, which took place on May 21, 1346, in Adrianople. In the summer of the same year, she accompanied her sister to Selymbria, where envoys of Theodora's future husband were waiting[1074] and may have observed from a distance the *prokypsis*[1075] that John Kantakouzenos staged

suggested by Nicol, is too early unless Gregoras counted the year before September 1, 1332, as one year and the year that began in September 1332 as the second. (The Byzantine year began on September 1.) The second half of 1334, proposed by *PLP*, is too late. If both Gregoras's and Doukas's information is correct, then Helene must have been born after September 1, 1333, and before the end of May 1334.

1070 For further information on Helene, see *PLP*, n. 21365. For useful chronological information about her life, see Failler (1973), 76–79. See also Nicol (1968), 135–138. *Manuel, Letters*, xlv.

1071 For a detailed outline of this conflict, see Nicol (1972B), 191–216, as well as the previous chapters on Anna of Savoy and Eirene Kantakouzene.

1072 *Gregoras* II, 624 f. (XII,16). Nicol (1996A), 62.

1073 For further details, see *PLP*, n. 21485.

1074 *Kantakouzenos* II, 587 f. (III,95).

1075 A ceremony in which a bride (or the emperor) was revealed to the public while wearing magnificent clothes and standing on a stage surrounded by silk curtains.

for her sister. While the sources do not comment on the relationship between the sisters, their youth spent together in Constantinople and later in Didymoteichon as well as the fact that years later Helene invited her widowed sister to live with her family in the palace suggest that they were close and that the separation from her sister was a difficult one for the future empress.

Marrying the enemy

On the night of February 2, 1347, John Kantakouzenos entered Constantinople and made peace with Empress Anna and her fifteen-year-old son. The peace treaty stipulated several conditions, including the marriage of John V[1076] to Helene Kantakouzene.[1077] While her father was arranging her wedding in the capital, Helene was most probably with her mother at the family estate in Didymoteichon,[1078] and in the early spring of 1347, she was in Adrianople.

On the appointed day,[1079] Eirene, Helene, and Maria, who was already married to Nikephoros II of Epiros,[1080] arrived at a site close to the Monastery of Theotokos

The stage was lit by kneeling eunuchs, who were invisible to the spectators. The scene was accompanied by music and poetry recited in honor of the one on the stage. For further details, see the previous chapter on Eirene Kantakouzene and *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 266 (XII).

1076 For details, see Nicol (1972B), 265–310. Zástěrová *et al.* (1996), 323–326. For a recent biography of John V, see Radić (2008). See also the older but more detailed work by the same author: Radić (1993).

1077 The sources offer differing information regarding the timing of the marriage agreement between John and Helene. In his chronicle, John Kantakouzenos mentions that in the initial stages of the civil war and prior to the coronation of John V (November 19, 1341), Anna Palaiologina (of Savoy) allegedly mentioned in conversation with her ladies-in-waiting that "due to his [John Kantakouzenos's] generosity towards me and my son John, we had agreed before the war began that his daughter Helene would marry my imperial son." (*Kantakouzenos* II, 203 (III,33), translation mine). According to Nikephoros Gregoras, the decision regarding the marriage had been made by Andronikos III (*Gregoras* II, 580, 583 (XII,3)). Doukas also says that the marriage had already been discussed before the war. He describes how Kantakouzenos wanted to become the father-in-law of the emperor but how the members of the senate, out of jealousy, advised the groom's mother to choose a bride from among the 'Alemans or Germans' in order to acquire foreign support. The empress, herself a foreigner (allegedly of 'Aleman' descent although, in modern terms, she was not German but Italian), gladly accepted their proposal and so, from Doukas's perspective, set in motion the events of the civil war (*Doukas*, 41 (V,2)). Finally, an anonymous chronicler noted that the wedding of John and Helene was one of the points discussed and agreed on by Kantakouzenos and Anna in February 1347 (*Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 84, n. 47).

1078 *Gregoras* II, 783 f. (XV,9).

1079 The precise date is unknown, but the event must have taken place between March and early May 1347.

1080 For details, see *PLP*, n. 16885. The wedding apparently took place in 1342 or earlier. Nicol (1996A), 43.

tes Peges, situated outside the southwestern section of the city walls.[1081] Here they were welcomed by the emperors and empress and a crowd of clergy, soldiers, senators, and common people[1082] who had gathered for the occasion.

> When they [Empress Eirene and her daughters Helene and Maria] arrived at the shrine of the Mother of God near the city, where the spring is rightly called "of the bountiful cures," the empress Anna came forth, accompanied by the emperors and all the illustrious officials. Helen then, who was soon to take up her abode with the young emperor (. . .) was adorned with the imperial insignia and proclaimed empress of the Romans.[1083]

Preparations for the coming ceremonies continued in full swing. On May 21, 1347,[1084] Isidore I Boucheiras, the new patriarch of Constantinople,[1085] crowned Helene's parents in the Theotokos Blachernitissa Church (the Church of Hagia Sophia having been damaged by an earthquake). Though John Kantakouzenos does not specifically mention Helene's presence at the ceremony, Nikephoros Gregoras noted that she sat on one of the three thrones prepared for the empresses. After the ceremony, the emperors and empresses rode to the palace, greeted the people who had gathered there, and enjoyed a special feast.[1086]

About a week later,[1087] the Blacherns Church was decorated again, this time for the wedding of John V and his young bride.[1088] After the wedding ceremony,

1081 The official welcome of an imperial bride generally took place at this site. See also *ODB* I, 25 f.

1082 *Kantakouzenos* III, 11 f. (IV,1). *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 85, 48c.

1083 *Kantakouzenos* III, 11 (IV,1). (Trans.) *Miller, Kantakouzenos*, 150. Nicol (1996A), 85.

1084 For details on this coronation, see the previous chapter on Eirene Kantakouzene.

1085 John XIV Kalekas was deposed at the beginning of February 1347.

1086 *Gregoras* II, 788 (XV,11). The fact that the newly crowned emperor and his wife did not feast alone, as was otherwise common on such occasions, is indicated by Gregoras's observation that five thrones were prepared not only for the ceremony at the church but also for the reception at the palace.

1087 The chronicles disagree on the precise date of this wedding. *Short Chronicle No. 8* (*Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 85, 48c, II, 271) claims that the wedding took place three days after the coronation of John Kantakouzenos and his wife, that is on May 24. Gregoras, on the other hand, places the ceremony seven days after the coronation, which would have been May 28 (*Gregoras* II, 791 (XV,11), Kantakouzenos mentions that the wedding took place on the eighth day after his own coronation, which he put to May 13, that is on May 21 (*Kantakouzenos* III, 29 (IV,4)). While May 24 is not an important feast of the Orthodox Church, May 28 was a Sunday and would have been a more auspicious day for an imperial wedding.

1088 *Gregoras* II, 791 (XV,11). In his commentary on the text of *Short Chronicle No. 8* (*Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* II, 271), Peter Schreiner noted that John V and his wife Helena were crowned on May 21 together with John and Eirene Kantakouzene. This is clearly incorrect as John V had received the crown on November 19, 1341, and he is also known to have crowned his wife after their wedding ceremony a week later. Gregoras later placed a speech in John's mouth in which the young

John (who had been crowned in November 1341) placed the imperial diadem on Helene's head. The newlyweds then presented themselves to the gathered crowds, who enthusiastically wished them a long reign: "May the years of John Palaiologos, the most pious emperor and autocrat of the Romans, and of Helene, the most pious empress, be many."[1089] It was doubtless a joyful time. Although the plates on the imperial table were made of porcelain and the emperors and empresses were adorned with imitation jewels of brass, gilded leather, and colored glass,[1090] the feasts and celebrations which accompanied the solemn ceremonies continued throughout the end of May and into the beginning of June.[1091]

Marriage, vying for the throne, and the Serbian proposal

Though Helene and John may have grown up regarding one another as enemies and John must have been aware that his union with Helene partly legitimized his father-in-law's ascent to power, the couple's first years together bear no sign of mutual resentment. On the contrary, in the first three years of their marriage, the young empress bore her husband three children: Andronikos (*April 11, 1348), named after his paternal grandfather,[1092] Eirene (*1349),[1093] named after her maternal

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emperor claimed that he did not marry Helene voluntarily. *Gregoras* III, 166 (XVII,42). Nicol (1996A), 88.

1089 *Doukas*, 65 (X,3). *Magoulias, Doukas*, 76,3. See also Nicol (1972B), 223.

1090 *Gregoras* II, 788 (XV,11).

1091 Doukas writes that John VI and Eirene Kantakouzene were crowned on the occasion of John and Helene's wedding and notes that Matthew Kantakouzenos became a despot on the same occasion (*Doukas*, 65 (X,3)). This claim is disproved by several contemporary sources. (See the references above.)). He also writes that the festivities were grand and compares the multitude of emperors and empresses to the twelve gods of old (an exaggeration, for there were only two emperors and three empresses after all).

1092 *PLP*, n. 21438. For further details on the emperor, see also the following chapter.

1093 *PLP*, n. 21352. The sources offer some interesting information on the life of Princess Eirene. As a small child, she was left in the care of her maternal grandmother when her parents departed for Thrace in 1352. She is a somewhat unusual figure, for it seems she never married. Her engagement to the Ottoman prince Halil (1358) was dissolved after the prince's untimely death, and a Byzantine proposal of marriage to Peter II of Lusignan, the king of Cyprus (1372), was rejected by the Cypriots. For an account of the Byzantine embassy to Cyprus, which describes Eirene as "most beautiful, wise, and learned," see *Machairas* I, 326–330. Apparently, Helene was allowed to watch her daughter grow into a woman – unlike most empresses. Unfortunately, nothing is known about their relationship or about the fate of the princess. Though the sources mention Eirene as the only daughter of the imperial couple, a study by Anthony Luttrell suggests that John V had at least two daughters of possibly illegitimate origin: Luttrell (1986), 103 ff. According to Nicol, John V also had an illegitimate son (Nicol (1972B), 304). Thierry Ganchou also mentions other female children of John V. See Ganchou (2014), 134 f.

grandmother, and Manuel (*1350).[1094] In September 1350,[1095] both emperors and the newly elected metropolitan, Gregory Palamas, departed for Thessalonike to stabilize the situation in the city following the turbulent years of Zealot rule.[1096] Helene did not accompany her husband on this journey. Their youngest son was only three months old at the time, so the young mother may have been reluctant to travel. Or perhaps Helene's parents thought that her husband would be more likely to behave himself if she and the children stayed in Constantinople.

Towards the end of the year, Kantakouzenos returned to the capital but left John V behind in Thessalonike.[1097] His newly acquired freedom did nothing to increase the junior emperor's respect for his father-in-law, however. In the summer of 1351 in the hope of securing full control over the empire, John V concluded a military alliance with the Serbian tsar, Stephan Uroš IV Dušan. Their agreement also contained a clause stipulating that John would deliver his wife Helene to Stephan in return for Stephan's Bulgarian sister-in-law, who would then become John's new empress-consort.[1098] Fortunately for Byzantium, the arrangement[1099] did not materialize. Though Stephan and his troops were soon encamped outside the walls of Thessalonike, Empress Anna arrived in time to prevent disaster. She managed to persuade her son to abandon the alliance and even made the Serbians withdraw from Byzantine territory.[1100] After she had secured peace, Anna took over the government of Thessalonike.

Early in 1352,[1101] John returned to Constantinople to reconcile himself with his in-laws. Though he was able to reach an agreement with his father-in-law, he could not settle his differences with Matthew, who refused even to attend the

1094 Failler (1973), 78, fn. 20. For further opinions, see *Schreiner, La chronique*, 339, no. 49, 371 ff. Loenertz (1957A), 183.

1095 Failler (1973), 77. Nicol (1972B), 235.

1096 The Zealots represented the Thessalonian working class. In 1342, they mobilized the people and forced the Kantakouzene governor and his clique to leave the city. They established a new regime led by two *archontes*. After several attempts to make peace with John Kantakouzenos, who had conquered Constantinople in the meantime, Thessalonike finally opened its gates to the new emperor, John VI, his son-in-law, John V, and its newly appointed metropolitan, Gregory Palamas, in 1350. For further details and literature, see *ODB* III, 2221 f.

1097 According to Donald Nicol, Anna of Savoy did not agree with this step. Nicol (1972B), 235.

1098 *Gregoras* III, 148 f. (XXVII,27), 169 (XXVII,51 f.). *Kantakouzenos* III, 246 (IV,33), 264 (IV,36). *Dölger, Regesten* V, 32, ns. 2993 f. This prospective bride was the sister of the Bulgarian tsar, John Alexander. See also Nicol (1972B), 244 f. Muratore (1906), 231 f. Nicol (1996A), 116.

1099 Such a plan would have involved a divorce. The case of Michael VIII and Theodora, described in an earlier chapter, shows that the representatives of the Orthodox Church were reluctant to grant such a request.

1100 *Kantakouzenos* III, 200–209 (IV,27).

1101 Failler (1973), 78.

family council. As the eldest son of John VI, Matthew was angry that his father had repeatedly declined to make him the heir to the throne, and his father's request that he surrender to John V part of the territory already apportioned to him could hardly have been to his liking either.

Tired of waiting for Matthew, John V decided to leave for his new residence in Didymoteichon.[1102] Helene was adamant about accompanying her husband and allegedly swore that she would rather die than continue to live with her parents.[1103] The young woman paid a high price for her decision since she had to leave her two older children behind. (Andronikos and Eirene were four and three years old respectively.) Taking only their youngest, Manuel, John and Helene departed for Thrace.[1104] The sources do not elucidate Helene's choice to accompany her husband although the incident with the Bulgarian princess may have been a factor. It seems that, as young as she was, the empress realized the necessity of bonding with her husband before the fierce family conflict could destroy their marriage. For the sake of that union, she adopted the name of her husband, abandoning that of her father, and followed John V into war and exile.

From Constantinople to Didymoteichon, Tenedos, and Thessalonike – and back again

In mid-March 1352,[1105] John and Helene took up residence in Didymoteichon in the ancestral territory of the Kantakouzenos clan.[1106] John VI probably agreed to this move because he hoped that his son-in-law would have fewer opportunities for intrigue when surrounded by servants and vassals who were faithful to the senior emperor; however, the young imperial couple did not find tranquility in Thrace. Coming back to the place where she had spent some of the most insecure years of her life could not have been easy for the empress. As for her husband, the conflict with his in-laws (especially with Matthew) reignited almost immediately. In early April 1352,[1107] Helene's mother arrived to mediate yet another dispute between her son and son-in-law but was forced to leave without achieving a truce.[1108] Neither Kantakouzenos nor Gregoras mention Helene's presence at this meeting. Did she, for once, wish to be left out of the family feud? Did she avoid

1102 Failler (1973), 78 f.
1103 *Gregoras* III, 150 (XXVII,29). For Helene joining her husband, see Gill (1985), 49.
1104 *Kantakouzenos* III, 238 (IV,32). Muratore (1906), 235.
1105 For dating, see Failler (1973), 78 f., 81.
1106 There are different opinions as to when the imperial couple settled in the Kantakouzenos domain. I follow the dating of Failler as presented in Failler (1973), 79. *Gregoras* III, 170 (XXVII,54).
1107 Failler (1973), 82 f.
1108 *Kantakouzenos* III, 238 f. (IV,32). *Gregoras* III, 152–171 (XXVII,31–54). Nicol (1972B), 245.

the meeting so as not to offend her mother by siding with her husband against her brother?

In the months that followed, a full-fledged war broke out between John and Matthew. While John requested military aid from the Serbian tsar and acquired 4,000 soldiers, Matthew received his support from his father in the form of a much larger Turkish army, which quickly defeated John's forces, plundered Thrace (with disastrous results), and permanently occupied Gallipolis in the fall of 1352. As the conflict escalated, John V and his family retreated briefly to Ainos, but by the end of the year, they were forced to set sail for a more secure refuge at Tenedos,[1109] which became Helene's home for most of the next year.[1110]

Despite recent setbacks, John Palaiologos was not prepared to capitulate. On the contrary, on March 17, 1353, he attempted to take Constantinople in a surprise attack but failed due to the vigilance of his mother-in-law, who was in charge of the defense of the city.[1111] The young emperor returned to Tenedos to wait for another opportunity. Because conditions on the island were neither comfortable nor secure, John dispatched Manuel and Helene, who was expecting their third son, Michael,[1112] to stay with his mother in Thessalonike.[1113]

Even though it did not succeed, John's attempted takeover unraveled the final threads of his father-in-law's patience. John VI decided to accede to his supporters' wishes and designate his eldest son, Matthew, his successor.[1114] Nevertheless, the patriarch of Constantinople, Kallistos I, refused to perform the coronation. He was summarily deposed, and the synod elected his replacement, Philotheos Kokkinos,[1115] who crowned Matthew in February of the following year.[1116] Soon after receiving the news of Matthew's coronation, John V suffered yet another misfortune when a rebellion occurred on Tenedos while he was visiting his family in Thessalonike.

1109 *Kantakouzenos* III, 253 (IV,34). Failler (1973), 86.

1110 *Gregoras* III, 182 (XXVIII,8). For further details, see Nicol (1972B), 246. Muratore (1906), 237.

1111 *Gregoras* III, 182 (XXVIII,8). Failler (1973), 87.

1112 *PLP*, n. 21522. Michael was born between late 1352 and 1354. *PLP*, n. 21522. He apparently gained political experience by accompanying his father on diplomatic journeys. He followed John to Buda in 1366. In November 1373, he sailed to Trebizond, where he may have attempted to dethrone Emperor Alexios III of Trebizond. When his plan failed, Michael returned to Byzantium (*Lampsides, Panaretos*, 78). Cf. Barker (1969), 477. Later, he married a Bulgarian lady and was murdered by her brother, Terter, in 1376/7 (*Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 214, n. 2).

1113 *Kantakouzenos* III, 256 (IV,35). Muratore (1906), 239.

1114 Failler (1973), 90.

1115 Kallistos was deposed in August 1353 and Philotheos was elected the same month. After a short stay in Galata, Kallistos departed for Tenedos. He returned to Constantinople in 1355 after John's conquest and resumed his office. For further details, see *ODB* II, 1095.

1116 Muratore (1906), 240.

Despite the fact that he managed to suppress the uprising and both he and Helene were able to return to the island, their situation remained insecure.[1117] Unwilling to endanger her small son, Helene apparently left Manuel behind in Thessalonike in the care of his grandmother, Anna.[1118]

Gradually, however, the prospects of the young couple began to brighten. Ever since Matthew's Turkish allies had ravaged Thrace, the Kantakouzene family had begun to lose support, not only among the common people but also among the aristocracy. On November 22, 1354, John V repeated his *coup d'état*[1119] and, with the help of Francesco Gattilusio, this time he succeeded in entering Constantinople.[1120] After brief negotiations, the two emperors agreed to rule the land together from the capital. A few days later, however, Kantakouzenos abdicated, took monastic vows, and left the imperial palace for the Mangana Monastery.[1121] On receiving the news of her husband's triumph, Helene left Tenedos for the capital at the beginning of 1355 and was finally reunited with her family.[1122] (Doukas claims that the empress had arrived in Constantinople shortly before her husband, along with her son Andronikos, who may have joined his parents in exile at some point. When John entered the city, Helene came to welcome him and, after they had embraced, the couple entered the palace[1123] that was to remain the residence of the empress and her family for another thirty-seven years.) The following year, she gave birth to her last (known) child, Theodore.[1124]

In 1356, an event took place that endangered the fragile peace between Byzantium and the Ottoman Sultanate. Byzantine pirates captured the Ottoman Prince Halil, the son of Sultan Orhan, north of Prusa and brought him to Palaia Phokaia on the coast of Asia Minor, where they handed him over to the governor, Leon Kalothetes.[1125] The sultan could not invade Phokaia as he would have had

1117 *Gregoras* III, 236 (XXIX,19). Muratore (1906), 239 f.

1118 *Kantakouzenos* III, 276 (IV,38).

1119 For details on how John V entered the city in 1354, see Miller (1913), 408 and Nicol (1972B), 250 ff. Muratore (1906), 241 (Muratore claims that the attack took place in December). Nicol (1967), 274.

1120 *Gregoras* III, 241 ff. (XXIX,27 f.). *Doukas*, 67 f. (XI,4). On John V's autonomous reign, see Nicol (1972B), 265–308.

1121 For further details on John's abdication, see Nicol (1967).

1122 Muratore (1906), 242.

1123 *Doukas*, 69 (XI,4).

1124 *PLP*, n. 21460. Helene's son Theodore became governor of Thessalonike for a brief period. From 1376 to 1379, he was imprisoned by his eldest brother, Andronikos, in the Anemas Tower along with his brother Manuel and his father. In 1382, he became the governor of Mistra and valiantly defended the Morea (Peloponnese) against the Turks. He married Bartolomea Acciauoli, daughter of Nerio I, the Duke of Athens. Though his marriage remained childless, Theodore had several illegitimate children. He died as a monk after a long illness on June 24, 1407.

1125 *Kantakouzenos* III, 321 f. (IV,44). For further details and literature on the case, see Tinnefeld (1981).

to pass through the Saruchan Emirate; therefore, he turned to John V, promising to abandon Matthew I Kantakouzenos, whom he had supported until then. Under the circumstances and due to Halil's (possible) relationship to the Palaiologan family,[1126] the emperor had no choice. Kalothetes, however, was not willing to release Halil, so the emperor had to pay the exaggerated sum of 100,000 hyperpyra to buy the prince's freedom. The empress stepped in and sold a large part of the collection of relics preserved in Constantinople (which later came into the possession of the Ospedalle della Scala in Siena).[1127] In the summer of 1358, Helene collected the money and achieved the release of Halil, whom the emperor then returned to his father.[1128] According to an agreement between John V and Orhan, Halil was betrothed to his and Helene's only daughter, Eirene, who was just nine years old.[1129] The marriage never actually took place due to the premature death of the groom.

Helene and the Palamite Controversy

In one of his studies, Stephen Runciman noted that "great families made constant use of dynastic marriages; and such marriages are pointless unless the bride is well enough educated and well enough informed to be capable of influencing her husband."[1130] Helene's marriage was a dynastic one, and she was certainly one of the most well-educated women of her time. The empress understood that by promoting her family of origin, she would damage her own family and endanger her marriage; therefore, in most situations, she supported the Palaiologan cause. As far as the sources are concerned, the only area where she sided with her father was in her deep commitment to Orthodoxy and to the Palamite doctrine.

Described in detail in the chapter on Anna of Savoy, the ancient practice of *hesychia* was a method of prayer that attempted to invoke both a mystical connection with God and internal quietude.[1131] From 1341, the Orthodox Church was divided over the legitimacy of this doctrine, developed by an Athonite monk and theologian named Gregory Palamas.[1132] The doctrine was critical of secular learning and found numerous opponents, particularly among the scholars of Constantinople. After the first anti-Palamite leaders, Barlaam of Calabria and Gregory Akindynos, were excommunicated by the Orthodox synod, Nikephoros Gregoras, a scholar and historian, became the chief opponent of the hesychast

1126 He may have been the son of Theodora Kantakouzene, sister of Empress Helene. This theory is supported by the fact that he was born around 1347, that is, shortly after Theodora's marriage.

1127 Hetherington (2003), 167 f.

1128 *Kantakouzenos* III, 331 (IV,45).

1129 *Gregoras* III, 504 f. (XXXVI, 6–8), 559 (XXXVII, 54 f.).

1130 Runciman (1984), 15.

1131 For further details, see the previous chapters on Anna of Savoy and Eirene Kantakouzene.

1132 For details on hesychast teaching and prayer, see *ODB* II, 923 f.

teaching. The victory of John Kantakouzenos (1347), who was an ardent supporter of Palamas, nullified the successes Gregoras had achieved under Empress Anna and Patriarch John Kalekas. In 1351, a synod proclaimed the Palamite doctrine Orthodox for the third time.

Though the sources do not mention a direct connection between Helene Palaiologina and Gregory Palamas, the empress apparently shared the views of her father.[1133] Nikephoros Gregoras repeatedly accused her of partiality towards his opponents and of influencing her husband's religious policy. After Kantakouzenos abdicated in 1354, Gregoras persuaded John V to renounce the Palamite teachings. John V, who perceived the doctrine as an obstacle to a new union with the Catholic Church, was willing to reopen the discussion. However, news of the emperor's change of heart soon reached Kantakouzenos and (through him perhaps) Helene as well. After her return from Tenedos, she convinced John to reconsider his anti-Palamite position.[1134] In 1355, she organized a debate between the two theologians in the presence of the papal legate, Paul of Smyrna. In his description of the event, Gregoras bitterly complained that the empress did not allow him to prepare for the encounter in advance.[1135]

Despite her loyalty to John, the empress's theological opinions clearly differed from those of her husband.[1136] While John wore his religion rather lightly and later converted to Catholicism in a desperate plea for military support,[1137] the empress was very devoted to Orthodox doctrine. She was not a fanatic though. The sources reveal that Helene maintained a long-term friendship with Demetrios Kydones[1138] despite his strong anti-Palamite views. The fact that he sent her his translations of the works of St. Augustine[1139] supports the impression that the empress was not only tolerant of different points of view but was even willing to become better acquainted with them.[1140]

1133 Meyendorff (1964), 109.

1134 *Gregoras* III, 252 f. (XXIX,43). See also Jugie (1931), 419.

1135 *Gregoras* III, 264 f. (XXIX,58 f.).

1136 *Gregoras* III, 264 f. (XXIX,58): "Because of her father Kantakouzenos, she [Helene] was also much in favor of Palamas and, in everything that had to do with religion, acted mostly against the intentions of her husband." (Translation mine.) Apparently, Helene participated in various meetings related to the Palamite controversy, see also *ibid.*, 506.

1137 For the circumstances, see Nicol (1972B), 270 ff.

1138 Demetrios Kydones held the office of *mesazon*, a sort of minister of the interior. Sophia Mergiali-Sahas has described him as "a man of acknowledged social, political and intellectual prestige, a convert to Catholicism, Latin speaking, respected and trusted by the Pope and the Westerners, Kydones was, undoubtedly, the most outstanding figure among John's officials and diplomats." Mergiali-Sahas (2001), 595.

1139 For details, see Kianka (1996), 157 f.

1140 Cf. Kianka (1996), 158 f.

Securing John's freedom

Turkish pressure on the borders of Byzantium continued to increase. In 1362, the Ottoman armies reached Didymoteichon and began to isolate the capital from its western territories. In 1366, eager to acquire military aid against the Turks, John V traveled to the Hungarian court in Buda accompanied by his three oldest sons, Andronikos, Manuel, and Michael. He hoped to persuade the Hungarian king, Louis the Great, to participate in a new crusade that was being planned by Amadeo VI of Savoy and Peter of Cyprus.[1141] Helene, like her mother before her, stayed behind in Constantinople to govern the empire in her husband's absence. For reasons which remain unclear,[1142] the negotiations in Buda failed, and the emperor was obliged to leave his son Manuel as a hostage at the Hungarian court.[1143] His misfortunes did not end there. On the homeward journey, the emperor and his entourage were trapped in Vidin when the independent ruler of eastern Bulgaria, Ivan Sracimir, who was mistrustful of the object of the negotiations in Buda, forbade John V to pass through his territory. Fortunately for the emperor, Amadeo VI of Savoy and his crusaders arrived in Constantinople in September 1366. When the Italian prince learned of the unfortunate plight of his relative,[1144] he resolved to organize a rescue party.[1145] Empress Helene, thankful for his assistance, raised 12,000 *hyperpyra* and provided two galleys for the enterprise.[1146] Amadeo and his soldiers then departed for Bulgaria and managed to effect John's return to the Byzantine capital by the beginning of the following year.

Negotiations with Rome and John V's conversion[1147]

From the time of the Great Schism of 1054, Roman popes had periodically attempted to bring Orthodox believers into the Catholic fold. In 1274, Michael VIII (via his legates) signed a document that officially ended the division. This reconciliation

1141 Steinhertz (1888), 568. For a detailed discussion of the events and a translation of this passage, see Setton (1976–1981) I, 290 f. For details on John's mission to Hungary and the unfortunate negotiations with King Louis I, see Gill (1977). For details on John's visit to Hungary, see Halecki (1930), 111–137.

1142 Setton suggests that John V may have feared a Hungarian invasion of the Balkan countries, which he perceived as a threat to Byzantine influence in the region. Setton (1976–1981) I, 300.

1143 For details, see Setton (1976–1981) I, 300. See also Nicol (1972B), 275 f.

1144 The Palaiologans were related to the Savoy family through the marriage of Andronikos III and Anna of Savoy (1326).

1145 For a detailed account of the expedition, see Setton (1976–1981) I, 301–306. Halecki (1930), 138–162. Nicol (1972B), 276 f.

1146 *Illustrazioni*, *The accounts of Barbier*, n. 111. Setton (1976–1981) I, 301. See also Halecki (1930), 147.

1147 For further details, see Nicol (1972B), 269–282. Halecki (1930), 188–212.

became known as the Union of Lyons. As the first chapter of this study pointed out, the Union divided Byzantine society, and Michael's son, Andronikos II, was eventually forced to abandon it in 1283. In June 1367, a papal legate arrived in Constantinople to promote a new union of the churches, but the patriarch refused to meet with him. John V then requested that his father-in-law (whom the account introduces as 'emperor Kantakouzenos'[1148]) take over the negotiations. Helene, her husband, and her two older sons all participated in these debates, which took place at the Blacherns Palace.[1149]

Following the negotiations, the emperor sent legates to speak with the pope. Nevertheless, it soon became clear that Urban V was not willing to call together a synod to discuss theological issues. Instead, he sent letters to twenty-three important personalities, one of whom was Empress Helene.[1150] Her 'religious fervor,' highly praised by the pope, must be placed in context. Though she may have been open to a new agreement with Rome, Helene would no doubt have insisted on the condition set by her father: that a new general council be convened to examine and approve the Catholic arguments before the churches reunited. As the pope did not intend to organize a new council, the negotiations of 1367 failed to produce any fruit.

Persuaded (or blackmailed) by his cousin and liberator Amadeo VI of Savoy[1151] and desperate to acquire Western military aid, John V sailed to Italy where he submitted to the pope in Rome and converted to Catholicism. The sources do not tell us what Helene thought about her husband's conversion, but the couple most probably remained divided on theological issues, for Helene did not accompany John to Rome. Instead, she maintained her Orthodox faith and eventually entered an Orthodox convent. While she certainly understood the reasons behind John's change of confession, as a devout Orthodox and an astute politician (who was well aware of the adverse influence of the Union on Byzantine society), she could hardly condone his decision.

John's journey to Italy proved a disaster. He received no promise of direct support from the pope, and as he had come to Venice[1152] to negotiate Byzantine debts but neglected to bring any money (except for the funds and jewels released to him by Amadeo of Savoy[1153]), the representatives of the republic decided to imprison him until their claims were satisfied. Ultimately, he promised to give the Venetians

1148 Meyendorff (1960), 170.

1149 For a report on the negotiations with a detailed introduction, historical circumstances, and an analysis, see Meyendorff (1960). Nicol (1972B), 278, 280. Nicol (1996A), 150.

1150 *Raynaldus, Annales*, 1367, n. 9. See also Halecki (1930), 147, 157, 167. Nicol (1972B), 280.

1151 Nicol (1972B), 279.

1152 For details on John's stay in Venice, see Loenertz (1958) and especially Chrysostomides (1965). Nicol (1972B), 283 f.

1153 Nicol (1972B), 282.

the island of Tenedos at the entrance to the Sea of Marmara. In return for this strategic location, the Venetians agreed not only to cancel the debts but also to return the Byzantine crown jewels. When the news of John's confinement reached his eldest son, who had taken charge of the empire in the interim, Andronikos refused to give up the island. It was Manuel (by then the governor of Thessalonike) who collected the money and went to the aid of his father. After complex negotiations that resulted in the sale of Tenedos to the Serenissima and kept Manuel a hostage in Venice, John was finally able to rejoin his wife in Constantinople in October 1371.[1154]

The learned empress-patroness[1155]

Despite the dramatic circumstances of Helene's life, her imperial duties, and her frequent involvement in political and theological matters, the empress managed to find time for her scholarly pursuits. The letters addressed to her and the literary works dedicated to her link Helene with the most eminent scholars of her time, especially the great philosopher, politician, and translator Demetrios Kydones,[1156] with whom she corresponded for nearly half a century (1347/52–1392). Unfortunately, none of her own letters have been preserved, so the modern scholar has access to only half of the 'conversation.' Where and how the empress met Kydones is unclear; their acquaintance may have been facilitated by John Kantakouzenos, who made Kydones his *mesazon* after his ascent to power.[1157] With their shared interest in learning, Kydones and Helene established a close relationship that later deepened into friendship. Over time, the empress conferred numerous favors on the scholar, requested copies of his writings, and entrusted him with the education of her son Manuel (and perhaps her other children). She became not only his literary sponsor but also his protector, someone to call on in a politically compromising situation.[1158] On her retirement to the Convent of Kyra Martha,[1159] Helene included Kydones among those who benefited from her pious distribution of her worldly goods. Their literary-political relationship continued (despite their being on opposite sides of the Palamite issue) well into the empress's widowhood, perhaps to the end of her life.[1160]

1154 Nicol (1972B), 283 f.

1155 On Helene as a patron, see Leonte (2011–2012).

1156 For details on Kydones, see *PLP*, n. 13876. *ODB* II, 1161. For a comprehensive overview of Palaiologan learning and the most important scholars of the period, see Ševčenko (2002). Leonte (2011–2012), 346–352.

1157 Alexander Kazhdan described the *mesazon* as "the emperor's confidant, entrusted with the administration of the empire." *ODB* II, 1346.

1158 *Kydones* II, 3–4, letter 134. For commentary, see Kianka (1996), 160 f.

1159 *Kydones* II, 103, 109, letter 222.

1160 *Kydones* II, 110, letter 222.

As Frances Kianka noted, Kydones had reason to bestow praise, written works, and thanksgiving on the empress. Helene probably enabled the scholar to continue his service at the imperial court after John V ascended to the throne in 1355. She later reconciled him with her husband after Kydones was accused of conspiring with Francesco I Gattilusio in 1374/5 and supported him in his political career despite his controversial anti-Palamite views.[1161]

Unfortunately, only six of Kydones's letters have survived from what was probably a much larger correspondence between the two.[1162] The earliest letter presents Helene as an accomplished writer and praises an oration in which the eighteen-year-old empress had extolled one of her father's victories, possibly his suppression of the Zealot Revolt in the fall of 1350.[1163] In his flowery missive, Kydones compares Helene Palaiologina with the legendary Helen of Sparta and argues that the empress outshines her namesake, saying that while the physical beauty of the ancient queen diminished with age, the splendor of the empress's words is eternal.[1164]

Another letter, somewhat broadly dated by the editor to between 1371 and 1374, praises Helene's interest in philosophy, which inspires others to study and value learning. Along with the letter, Kydones sent her his translation of selected sermons of St. Augustine, whom he greatly admired as a scholar able to draw on the wisdom of ancient philosophers and bring it into agreement with the teachings of the church.[1165] This letter testifies to the open-mindedness of the empress, whose Palamite leanings did not prevent her from becoming acquainted with the teachings of Western philosophers. A third letter accompanied a sermon written by Kydones on St. Lawrence as an acknowledgement of the saint's further unspecified help.[1166] The scholar sent his fourth letter (dated 1374/5) to the empress along with choice fruit from his garden.[1167] In his fifth missive, Kydones requested Helene's support. This marks a change from the previous letters, in which the philosopher figures as a teacher, fellow scholar, translator, writer, and gardener. He writes to her from Lesbos, where he was a guest of the ruler of the island, Francesco I Gattilusio. The visit led some to suspect the scholar of conspiring with Gattilusio, so Kydones asked the empress to persuade John V and Manuel II of his innocence and send

1161 Kianka (1996), 163 f.

1162 Kydones's correspondence was studied by Frances Kianka, see Kianka (1996), 155–164. The dating of the letters follows Kianka (1996).

1163 *Tinnefeld, Kydones*, I/1, 187–189, see especially note I. For details on the Zealot Revolt, see *ODB* III, 2221 f. In her study, Frances Kianka did not connect the missive with any particular deed of Helene's father but considered the composition a mere exercise in rhetoric. Kianka (1996), 156.

1164 *Kydones* II, 340. *Tinnefeld, Kydones*, 188, n. 24. Kianka (1996), 155 f., n. 389.

1165 *Kydones* II, 103–110. *Cammelli, Kydones*, 27 ff. Kianka (1996), 157 ff., n. 25.

1166 *Kydones* II, 160. Kianka (1996), 159, n. 256.

1167 *Kydones* II, 12 f. Kianka (1996), 160, n. 143.

word as to whether he might safely return to the Byzantine capital.[1168] Back in Constantinople, Kydones wrote his last known letter to Helene shortly before the empress entered a convent. In it he describes Helene's kindness toward him and offers a touching image of the multiple sufferings imposed on her by repeated strife within the imperial family. He mentions the imprisonment of John V and her sons Manuel and Theodore as well as their escape, her own detention in Galata, the ovations surrounding her return to Constantinople, and her charity towards the poor and her friends (including Kydones), all of which will be mentioned later in this chapter.[1169]

Helene's relationship with another important scholar of her time, Nikephoros Gregoras, was more problematic. As a close friend of the Kantakouzene family, Gregoras must have known Helene for many years. Apparently, the two had discussed philosophy and the natural sciences during one of their meetings. Based on this private discourse, Gregoras later addressed a treatise entitled *Solutiones quaestionum* to Helene.[1170] The text deals with eight questions concerning, for the most part, aspects of the natural sciences, vision and visibility, or the qualities of air, water, the sea, nature, the sun, and the earth. On another occasion, Gregoras addressed a letter to the empress in which he praised her learning and then proceeded to discuss questions of a scholarly nature.[1171] Unlike her friendship with Demetrios Kydones, the empress's relationship with Gregoras did not survive their differing opinions on the Palamite doctrine. While Gregoras seized every opportunity to denounce the hesychast teachings of his opponent, Helene used her influence to promote them. The veiled reproach with which the historian described the empress's support of his adversary suggests that their paths eventually diverged.

At some point, Philotheos Kokkinos,[1172] the patriarch of Constantinople, dedicated a study on the biblical Sermon on the Mount to Helene.[1173] Unfortunately, there is almost no other information regarding the empress's relationship with the man. Though she may have met Kokkinos earlier through her father, Helene could only have become more closely acquainted with him in the course of his second patriarchate (1364–1376).

1168 *Kydones* II, 3–4. Kianka (1996), 160 f., n. 134.

1169 *Kydones* II, 103–110, n. 222. *Cammelli, Kydones,* 68–77. Kianka (1996), 161 ff., n. 222.

1170 See *Gregoras, Solutiones.* It has been suggested that Gregoras also offered his *Commentary on the Work of Synesius, De insomniis* to Helene. *Monacensis gr.* 29 contains a dedication to a 'Palaiologina' along with adequate female endings (for details, see Ševčenko (1964), 438 f). However, Helene is not the only Palaiologina to whom the scholar may have dedicated this work. His great devotion to Eirene Palaiologina Choumnaina (*PLP*, n. 30936), whom he frequently praised, is well known. For Gregoras's eulogy on the *basilissa*, see *Gregoras* III, 238–240 (XXIX,22 ff.).

1171 *Gregoras, Epistulae* II, 144–147, n. 42.

1172 For details, see *ODB* III, 1662.

1173 *Philotheos*, 155–165.

Empress-mother or empress-philosopher?

Though the Byzantine primary sources only rarely present the empresses in their role as mothers, Helene's personality, interests, views on education, and interactions with her children were all described in the *Dialogue with the Empress-Mother on Marriage*,[1174] written by her son Manuel II. In a dialogue[1175] that may have been based on a real conversation, or series of conversations, between Manuel and his mother, the empress attempts to persuade her son, originally a professed bachelor, to take a wife. By the time Manuel took up his pen, the "object" of the *Dialogue* was only hypothetical, for the emperor was already married to the Serbian princess Helene Dragaš and had children by her.[1176] Considering this fact, Professor Dabrowska has argued that Manuel revised his text to impress on his son John the importance of having a wife and children.[1177] The text, which does not lack humor, reveals a close relationship and a light-hearted manner between mother and son. (On one occasion Manuel remarks, "It will certainly be a pleasure, Mother, to become your prey."[1178])

Helene, as depicted by her son in this dialogue, builds her case in a sophisticated manner. She points out that marriage is a moral obligation, legitimate and honorable, and causes the spouses to be viewed with respect.[1179] She then proceeds to name the dangers faced by a celibate emperor: the possibility that his subjects will imitate their ruler and cease to marry and the reality that a childless emperor is more likely to lose his realm than one who has offspring.[1180] When her son suggests that in difficult and dangerous times it is, perhaps, better to remain single,[1181] she responds by saying that a wife supports her husband throughout his life and that, even though marriage may cause anxiety, it releases the spouses from the difficulties arising from single life.[1182] The emperor then argues that children require care and education and may cause their parents a great deal of distress if they become ill or die. In response, Helene highlights the joys of parenting and the opportunity to promote life on earth through one's offspring.[1183] Finally, Manuel brings up the

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1174 For an introduction, the text, and a translation of the text, see *Manuel, Dialogue*. For edition, see also *De matrimonio*. Hilsdale (2014), 279–288. See also Leonte (2009).

1175 For details on the form and subject of the dialogue, see *Manuel, Dialogue*, 49–57. For a literary background of written dialogues in the Palaiologan period, see Gaul (2017). For an analysis of the narrative of the *Dialogue*, see Leonte (2017) and Leonte (2009).

1176 *Manuel, Dialogue*, 70, ls. 199–200.

1177 Dabrowska (2007).

1178 *Manuel, Dialogue*, 78, (trans.) 79.

1179 *Manuel, Dialogue*, 80, 82, 84.

1180 *Manuel, Dialogue*, 88.

1181 *Manuel, Dialogue*, 94.

1182 *Manuel, Dialogue*, 102, 104.

1183 *Manuel, Dialogue*, 106.

evil of armed conflict between brothers as an argument against having children. Helene, however, maintains her claim to the contrary, using the conflict between Manuel and his nephew John VII as an example. She argues that everyone is aware that John is younger than his uncle and, therefore, likely to live longer. This simple deduction could, in her opinion, motivate many of their subjects to abandon Manuel in favor of John, which would not happen if Manuel had an heir.[1184] After this final argument, the emperor admits that his mother is in the right and deserves the prize, which is announced with his characteristic wit:

> Golden crowns are, at present, in short supply, but everybody is eager for one, and there is danger that it might be stolen during the ceremony. Let the award, then, be of roses and branches, so that the victor may go home with the prize still in his possession.[1185]

In addition to his primary objective (that of encouraging John to marry), Manuel used this literary work to present Helene as a mother actively involved in the upbringing of her children. When the empress expressed her desire that the discourse might continue in the "usual way" (*εἰωθότως*), it suggests that such conversations were a frequent pastime for mother and son. Furthermore, the emperor presented his mother as someone superior even to himself and thus acknowledged the importance of her influence on his life and scholarly career. The empress was certainly a vital presence in the lives of her children. In the *Funeral Oration* dedicated to his brother Theodore, Manuel noted that Helene "exercised by far the strongest influence on her sons in advising them as to what they ought to do."[1186] Besides supporting her sons, she also provided her daughter with a good education. The account of Machairas described the negotiations surrounding the marriage of the young princess and a Cypriot prince and likewise claimed that Eirene (whom he called Theodora) was wise, learned, and "well skilled in letters."[1187] In the *Dialogue*, Manuel aptly portrayed the educational philosophy of his mother, whose primary intention was to develop the character of her children. The following quote, which Manuel attributed to Helene, illustrates her outlook:

> But even if I had to expose you and even if I had to make you look ridiculous or upset you in any other way, I personally would have spared no effort – you can be sure – to strengthen your character if undermined or set it right if warped or rescue it if corrupted. It is just not true that I have thought it more important to please my sons than to improve them.[1188]

1184 *Manuel, Dialogue*, 110.
1185 *Manuel, Dialogue*, 116, (trans.) 117.
1186 *Manuel, Funeral Oration*, 103.
1187 *Machairas* I, 328, (trans.) 329. See also Dabrowska (1996), 37.
1188 *Manuel, Dialogue*, 60, (trans.) 61, 74.

Through the lines of the *Dialogue* more than through any other source, the contours of the empress's personality gradually emerge. Helene valued truth.[1189] She was also (mostly) direct, pious, logical, strict, and unsentimental.[1190] Furthermore, she was an excellent thinker and a woman of great humor and courage. ("A man should not, my dear, fear shadows."[1191]) But despite the "iron shell" she assumed in the *Dialogue*, she was also a caring and affectionate woman. Sometime between 1365 and 1383, Manuel penned Helene a letter, comforting her over the death of some children of tender age who were in her care and whose loss, apparently, had driven her to the brink of death.[1192]

The curse of the Palaiologans

If Helene's life were a scene in a play, her learning, her correspondence with friends, and the discourses with her son would create the backdrop while family strife and civil war, both of which became a destructive pattern within the imperial family in the course of the empress's life, would dominate the center stage. Helene's family life was demanding in the extreme. When her parents took their monastic vows in 1354, the empress probably experienced relief, believing that the prolonged struggle between the Kantakouzene and the Palaiologan families had ended. Soon afterwards, she would have realized that her joy had been premature as history began to repeat itself in the struggle between John V and his eldest son, Andronikos IV. As Setton noted,[1193] the origins of this unfortunate conflict may have been rooted in Andronikos's confinement in Vidin (1365) when the young prince (already married to a Bulgarian princess) had created a network of allies, who later supported him in his rebellion against his father. However, there is reason to believe that the roots of the estrangement can be found even further in the past, back in the time when the three-year-old Andronikos spent four years with his grandparents, who may not always have spoken of his father with esteem or affection. The conflict between father and son became evident in 1371 when Andronikos refused to collect the money owed to the Venetians in order to effect his father's release. It continued on May 6, 1373, when Andronikos left Constantinople to scheme with Savci bey,

1189 *Manuel, Dialogue*, 62.

1190 *Manuel, Dialogue*, 72, 74.

1191 *Manuel, Dialogue*, 108, (trans.) 109.

1192 *Manuel, Letters*, 2–5, for general notes on the empress, see p. xlv. The identity of the children remains unclear, but based on one copy of the missive in which Manuel ascribed their death to his own sins, the editor suggested that they may have been Manuel's illegitimate children, fathered in the long years of his bachelorhood (*Manuel, Dialogue*, 96 f.). In her study, Professor Dabrowska suggested that the passage of the *Dialogue* where Manuel argues that children bring distress when they become ill and die may likewise refer to his own illegitimate children. Dabrowska (2007), 150.

1193 Setton (1976–1981) I, 300.

the son of the Ottoman sultan, while John V was on an expedition with the sultan as one of his vassals. The revolt of the two young men failed, and the merciless sultan had his son blinded and killed. Moreover, he forced John V to imprison, disinherit,[1194] and blind Andronikos and his young son. Though the cruel punishment was performed with all possible care, both Andronikos and John struggled with diminished eyesight for the rest of their lives.[1195] Helene must have been deeply grieved by this tragedy that she, like her husband, could not prevent.

As could be expected, the strife between Andronikos and John did not end when the rebellion was quashed, and Helene was soon caught up in a new storm. In 1376, Andronikos fled to Galata[1196] and from there to Sultan Murad I. With Murad's support, he was soon able to proclaim himself emperor, enter Constantinople, and imprison his father and two younger brothers, Manuel and Theodore, in the infamous Anemas Tower (August 12, 1376).[1197] Not long afterward, Helene received the news that her third son, Michael, had been murdered by his brother-in-law (November 1376/7). In one of his letters, Demetrios Kydones painted a vivid image of Helene's difficult position within the family when he spoke of the constant plotting and how she, as daughter, wife, and mother, was the first to be suspected of being allied with the opposing party. Kydones noted the hopeless nature of her plight as she repeatedly had to decide whom to help and whom to betray, powerless to speak up but unable to remain silent, always trying to come to the aid of the weaker party. In his letter he uses a fitting metaphor to describe her position as "on both sides, an abyss opened."[1198]

Andronikos IV had himself crowned emperor on October 18, 1377.[1199] Helene remained free, but her pleas for her husband and younger sons fell on deaf ears. When John, Manuel, and Theodore escaped in June 1379,[1200] Andronikos accused Helene of orchestrating their flight. Forced to leave the capital, the young emperor took his mother with him as a hostage, along with her sisters (Maria and Theodora) and his grandfather, John Kantakouzenos.[1201] John V and Manuel entered Constantinople on July 1.[1202] Manuel soon had Galata under siege, which only exacerbated the prisoners' dire situation. Food became scarce, and Helene received

1194 Some scholars believe that Manuel was not only proclaimed but also crowned in 1373. See, for example, *Majeska, Travellers*, 418–420.

1195 Nicol (1972B), 288.

1196 According to Nicol, the escape was the work of the Genoese of Galata, who saw it as a way to prevent a new agreement between John V and the Venetians. See Nicol (1972B), 289.

1197 For details, see Barker (1969), 32, 457.

1198 *Kydones* II, 106. *Cammelli, Kydones*, 72.

1199 *Chalkokondyles* I, 57. *Lampros, Short chronicles*, n. 52, 89. Barker (1969), 29.

1200 Their flight is placed to July 1, 1379, by *Short Chronicle n. 22* (*Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 182 f., n. 20).

1201 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 183, n. 20. Barker (1969), 39. Gill (1985), 52 f.

1202 *Lampros, Short chronicles*, n. 52, 89. Barker (1969), 35.

only moldy bread to eat. She was harassed by her jailers and distressed by the news that the plague had broken out inside the besieged city. John and Andronikos were finally reconciled in May 1381. John V resumed control of the empire, and Andronikos was reinstated as heir to the throne. He also received Selymbria, along with the surrounding towns, as his own principality. Helene and her relatives returned to Constantinople amidst great ovations as the inhabitants welcomed her heartily and praised her as a wise and virtuous empress and benefactress.[1203]

Andronikos IV predeceased his parents in June 1385. His body was brought to Constantinople, where he was buried in the Pantokrator Monastery. Even his death did not bring peace to the empire, for his son, the young prince John (VII), promptly took up the struggle of his father. Each reaching out to the Ottoman court for aid, John V and John VII alternated on the throne.[1204] In these unstable times, Helene apparently lived in the capital, where she remained free but suspect, perhaps even kept under surveillance by her closest family members.

In the meantime, the Turkish conquest had reached its peak with a victory over the Serbian and Bosnian troops at Kosovo in 1389. Although Sultan Murad died in the battle, his son Bayezid was prepared to assume command. He made Serbia a vassal kingdom and put the Athos monasteries under his jurisdiction. Simultaneously, he united Asia Minor by dismissing the leading emirs of Aydin, Saruchan, and Menteshe and kept Byzantium divided by playing the members of the imperial family against one another. For a time, he supported John VII and blackmailed John V by threatening to blind and imprison his son Manuel. It was under these circumstances that John V died after a lifetime of vying for power.

Hypomone

After the death of her husband on February 16, 1391,[1205] Helene decided to take the veil. There is no record of her having made gifts to monastic foundations during her life. When she entered the Convent of Kyra Martha in Constantinople[1206] (1391/2),

1203 *Kydones* II, 108. *Cammelli, Kydones*, 74. Nicol (1972B), 292 f.

1204 See, for details, Barker (1969), 72–78. For the struggle of Manuel and John VII in 1390, see *Majeska, Travellers*, 408–415.

1205 *Short Chronicle n.* 22 mentions his demise on February 15, 1391 (*Schreiner, Kleinchroniken*, 181, n. 8). In his work, Laonikos Chalkokondyles recounts a story in which Helene Palaiologina is said to have predeceased her husband, who later married (or took as mistress) a princess from Trebizond sent to Constantinople as a bride for his son Manuel. As various scholars have indicated, Helene survived her husband by many years, and the whole story is a mistake on the part of the late Byzantine author. For an overview of this matter, see Barker (1969), 80 f., 475 ff. For details on the burial place of John V, see Barker (1969), 469 f.

1206 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 183, n. 22. For discussion, see *ibid.* II, 348 f. See also Barker (1969), 477 f. For details on the last years of the empress, see Barker (1969), 474–478. Nicol (1972B), 305.

the same monastery that her mother and sister (Maria) had chosen, she distributed most of her possessions to the poor and gave souvenirs to her friends. Helene's monastic name, Hypomone (Patience), reflects her sense of humor and makes a fitting summary of the empress's life. In the same year, the empress probably witnessed the wedding and coronation of her son Manuel and Helene Dragaš.[1207] When describing the imperial coronation, *Pseudo-Kodinos* states that the mother of the emperor about to be crowned should sit on a throne, wearing her crown, along with the new imperial couple.[1208] The fact that there were only two thrones at Manuel's coronation[1209] is evidence that the elder Helene, if present, preferred to watch the ceremony from the sidelines, possibly from the imperial box. Her reasons for not taking an active part in the wedding she had so desired might have included the fact that she had already taken the veil and wished to maintain the seclusion and privacy of her monastic life.

Like her parents, Helene-Hypomone participated in the political life of the empire even after she had entered the convent. When Manuel[1210] was forced to join an Ottoman military campaign from June 1391 to January 1392, she ruled the empire in his absence,[1211] and even after his return, she remained involved in affairs of state. Shortly before July 20, 1392,[1212] the Venetian senate requested an audience not only with Manuel (as the ruling emperor) but also with his mother. This request can be interpreted as evidence that, like other Palaiologan empresses, Helene did not relinquish her role in the political life of the empire after taking the veil. By entering Kyra Martha, she may have been trying to allow the ruling couple, Manuel and Helene Dragaš, to enjoy greater privacy in the palace.

To the very end of her life, the empress-nun remained invested in the affairs of the Byzantine Empire. She died shortly after she and her son had agreed to the sale of Corinth to the Hospitallers in the hope of stabilizing the situation in the Morea.[1213] At that time, there was no historian to systematically follow the events of the imperial court, for both Nikephoros Gregoras and John Kantakouzenos were dead. The demise of the empress, who was apparently beloved by the Byzantine people, was not recorded in any of the short chronicles. Though the precise date of Helene's death remains unknown, Father Laurent persuasively argued for

1207 *Majeska, Travellers*, for the report of Ignatius of Smolensk, see 105–113. For further details, see the chapter on Helene Dragaš.

1208 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 218–220 (VII).

1209 *Majeska, Travellers*, 107.

1210 *Majeska, Travellers*, 412–415.

1211 As John Barker noted, "these references do not prove categorically that Helena was not in a convent. Conceivably she could have taken the veil at any time after John V's death, but she might have enjoyed an encloisterment which did not cut her off entirely from the world and the government." Barker (1969), 87, 478. Nicol (1972B), 311.

1212 *Thiriet, Régestes* I, 196, n. 820. See also Nicol (1968), 137, fn. 6.

1213 *Manuel, Funeral Oration*. Barker (1969), 146, fn. 37.

November 1396.[1214] Her burial place is likewise unidentified, but she was probably buried in the Convent of Kyra Martha, where she lived out the last years of her life and where her grandmother, mother, and sister all found their final resting places. Every year, Orthodox believers remember her as the faithful empress "Helene, according to the angelic robe, the nun Hypomone."[1215]

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Even from the fragmentary information provided by the sources, Helene Palaiologina stands out as a remarkable woman. Married at the age of fourteen to a man who was in conflict with her family and who was prone to rash decisions (often followed by catastrophic consequences), she survived numerous conflicts between family members and watched as foreign armies placed increasing pressure on the ever-receding borders of a diminishing empire. Though often the scapegoat in family quarrels, she was repeatedly involved in governing, ruling both in the absence of her husband and of her son. By preventing John V from taking steps to abolish the hesychast teaching, Helene also made an important contribution to the eventual victory of the Palamite doctrine. Finally, her interest in learning (which she passed on to her son Manuel) and her support of scholars such as Demetrios Kydones left their indelible mark on the intellectual movement known as the Palaiologan Renaissance.

In spite of her determination to take an active role in the public sphere, Helene was able to make time for her children and friends. A note preserved in *Codex Upsaliensis* describes her as a wonderful wife and empress and compares her with the mother of Constantine the Great.[1216] This was not an exaggeration, for Helene possessed the same courage and zest for life that marked the personality of her saintly namesake. Nor is this the only similarity between the two women. The fourteenth-century empress, after enduring so much family conflict, also went on to give the empire one of its best emperors – in the person of Manuel II.

1214 Laurent argues first that Helene died between August and December 1396 (Laurent (1955), 135–138). In a later note, based on Manuel's *Letter 64* (which was addressed to Kydones) and on his work *On marriage*, he places her death to November 1396 (see both Laurent (1955), especially 137 f. and Laurent (1956), 200 f.). See also Barker (1969), 478. Mioni, in his edition, argued that the empress died in August 1397 (*Mioni, Cronaca inedita*, 75, n. 24).

1215 *Gouillard, Synodikon*, 103. Nicol (1972B), 305.

1216 *Cod. Upsaliensis* gr., 59.

IX Eirene Palaiologina: The Captive Empress
(1354–1357)

Introduction

Among the children of Emperor Andronikos II and Eirene-Yolanda (of Montferrat) was a son named Demetrios.[1217] Though apparently not an ambitious man himself, his mother Eirene was always eager to provide what she considered a suitable situation for her children and contrived a way to secure the Serbian throne for her son. In obedience to his mother's wishes, Demetrios journeyed to the Serbian court, where he was welcomed by Tsar Stephan Uroš II Milutin and his sister Simonis. As the couple had been unable to have children, the tsar was willing (or pretended to be willing) to pass his kingdom on to his brother-in-law. Demetrios, however, proved unable to win the favor of the Serbian nobility, and he soon returned home to settle in Thessalonike, where he got married. He and his wife (possibly Theodora Komnene[1218]) had two or three children,[1219] one of whom was Eirene Palaiologina,[1220] the future empress of Byzantium.

Very little is known about Eirene's early life. As Demetrios was born around 1295 and Eirene married in 1341, her birth may be placed to the early 1320s. The princess apparently spent her childhood in Thessalonike, which her father governed in 1322 and then again in 1327–1328. The family owned property there, which had been bequeathed to them by her grandmother, Empress Eirene. The apparently peaceful life of Demetrios's family was interrupted by the First Civil War, in which the prince sided with his father, Andronikos II. The older emperor's resignation in 1328 placed the despot and his family in great danger. Demetrios fled to Serbia, but his wife and children became prisoners of the victorious Andronikos III. The sources are silent regarding the place, duration, and conditions of Eirene's captivity. The emperor may not have been too severe on his aunt and young cousins as they did not represent a direct threat to his person or his reign. Demetrios later returned from exile and was charged with treason. In 1336/7, Andronikos III decided to drop the charges against his uncle after the intervention of the former Serbian queen, Demetrios's sister Simonis.[1221] If Andronikos III had not released

1217 *PLP*, n. 21456.
1218 See Polemis (1968), 160. *PLP*, n. 21456, Anmerkung.
1219 Papadopoulos, following DuCange (DuCange (1680), 261 f.), mentions three children (Papadopoulos (1938), 40, n. 63). *PLP*, n. 21456 notes that Eirene had at least one other sibling.
1220 *PLP*, n. 21357.
1221 *PLP*, n. 21398.

Eirene, her mother, and her sibling(s) earlier, he certainly did so after he had pardoned her father.

Wedding in Thessalonike

Following their reconciliation with the young emperor, Eirene's family apparently returned to their private estate in Thessalonike. It is in one of the churches of that city that the princess appears several years later, this time as a young bride. John Kantakouzenos mentions that Andronikos III arrived in Thessalonike in the fall of 1340, intending to winter in the city. In the course of his stay, he participated in the wedding of his cousin, Eirene Palaiologina, and Matthew Kantakouzenos, John's eldest son.[1222] As the proud father and historian mentions in his account, the occasion was celebrated with all due magnificence.[1223]

Marriage and civil war

An unexpected turn of events concluded Eirene's first year of marriage: Andronikos III died in mid-June 1341, and in October of the same year, the struggle between Empress Anna of Savoy and John Kantakouzenos pulled the empire, still recovering from a previous conflict, into another destructive civil war. At the command of the empress (or her advisors), three members of John Kantakouzenos' immediate family who were present in the capital at the time were detained and placed under house arrest: the mother of John Kantakouzenos, Theodora; his youngest son, Andronikos; and his daughter-in-law, Eirene.[1224] Whether the princess escaped, was allowed to leave, or remained in custody is unclear, but while Kantakouzenos informs us that Theodora and Andronikos were later put under heavy guard,[1225] Eirene's name is missing from his account and does not reappear later on. Even though Kantakouzenos does not mention her presence in Didymoteichon, she may well have found shelter with other women from the Kantakouzenos family who spent the war years in that city. Her native Thessalonike, which was seized by the Zealots (1342–1349),[1226] would hardly have been a safe place for the wife of Matthew Kantakouzenos since the Zealots introduced their own regime only

1222 *PLP*, n. 10983. Nicol (1968), 108–122. Nicol (1996A), 43.

1223 *Kantakouzenos* I, 534 (II,38). The wedding has been dated to the beginning of 1340 by Bogiatzides (*Bogiatzides, Chronikon* I, 161) and Papadopoulos (Papadopoulos (1938), 41) or to 1339 by Zakythinos (Zakythinos (1932), I, 102). Cf. Nicol (1968), 108, see also fn. 2. The wording of Kantakouzenos's text clearly implies that the wedding took place in the winter of 1340–1341, perhaps at the beginning of 1341. For details, see also *Fatouros, Kantakouzenos* III, 248 f., n. 350.

1224 *Kantakouzenos* III, 136 (IV,20), 143 (IV,20). Nicol (1968), 129.

1225 *Kantkouzenos* III, 143 (IV,20).

1226 For further details, see *ODB* III, 2221 f.

after destroying the Kantakouzene supporters in the city. Because Matthew was with his father on his military ventures, Eirene did not see much of her husband throughout most of the war. Despite their prolonged separations, she gave birth to five children during this time: two sons, John [1227] and Demetrios,[1228] and three daughters, Theodora,[1229] Helene, and Maria,[1230] whose upbringing must have occupied most of her time.

Ascent to the throne

As Eirene took no active role in the political affairs of the empire, her activities and concerns must be deduced, though very generally, from the biography of her husband. The fact that John VI failed to name Matthew his successor after being proclaimed emperor in Didymoteichon in 1341 or after being crowned emperor in Adrianople in May 1346 or even after the coronation in Constantinople in May 1347 must have been very frustrating for the ambitious prince, who had played an important role in the military successes of his father and had saved his life on at least one occasion.[1231] At the end of 1347, following the advice of his uncle (John Asen),[1232] Matthew sought out those who favored the Kantakouzenos dynasty and attempted to revolt against John V. Matthew was persuaded to abandon his plans by the timely intervention of his mother, Eirene Kantakouzene.[1233] He then contented himself with an independent territory centered in Adrianople, which became the residence of his family. Though the sources do not mention her move to Adrianople, the fact that we find her there before her coronation in 1354 implies that Eirene eventually followed her husband to Thrace. It was not a peaceful season of her life. In the early 1350s, Eirene's husband once again fell out with John V, and the conflict between the two princes began in earnest.

The situation came to a head when John attempted an unsuccessful surprise attack on Constantinople in March 1353. The incident created considerable unrest among the people of the city, a situation that Matthew's faction, eager for more power, exploited. They managed to persuade John VI, who was deeply upset

1227 *PLP*, n. 10972.
1228 *PLP*, n. 10961.
1229 *PLP*, n. 10939.
1230 Papadopolous mentions six children, adding a son named George and naming one of the daughters Eirene. Papadopoulos (1938), 41, n. 64. Nicol (1968), 121, see also fn. 36. For details on Eirene and Matthew's children, see Nicol (1968), 156–160.
1231 See, for example, *Kantakouzenos* III, 66 (IV,10). *Gregoras* II, 835–839 (XVI,7). Nicol (1996A), 88.
1232 *Gregoras* II, 798–804 (XVI,2).
1233 For a detailed overview of Matthew's life, see Nicol (1968), 110–122. For the passage related to Eirene Kantakouzene's embassy, see *Kantakouzenos* III, 110–11 (IV,16).

by John Palaiologos's behavior, to finally inaugurate his eldest son as his successor. Yielding to the pressure of family and supporters, John VI Kantakouzenos proclaimed Matthew his co-emperor.[1234] The festive act took place in the Palace of Blacherns around April 15, 1353,[1235] and the names of Matthew and Eirene consequently replaced those of John V and his wife Helene in the imperial acclamations. As Eirene is not mentioned by the sources on this occasion, she may not have been present for this unexpected moment of triumph. Preparations for the coronation came to a sudden halt, however, when Patriarch Kallistos refused to crown the young prince. Within four months, John VI had Kallistos deposed and replaced by one of his own partisans, Philotheos Kokkinos. After his proclamation, Matthew returned to his family in Adrianople.[1236]

In November 1353, the new patriarch was duly inaugurated, and the capital prepared for the coronation of the young imperial couple. Matthew summoned Eirene to Constantinople in February 1354.[1237] In a festive ceremony at the Theotokos Blachernitissa Church,[1238] the patriarch and Emperor John VI crowned Matthew, who then placed a crown on the head of his wife, Empress Eirene Palaiologina.[1239] Gregoras specifically mentions that this time, John VI recognized his son as his heir.[1240] A pyxis, which was created around 1355, appears to commemorate this occasion (see Ill. 9). It bears the images of six figures – two emperors, two empresses, and two young princes – each identified by an abbreviated name, clearly representing two families. The remaining space is filled with dancers, musicians, and a kneeling figure holding a model of a palace (or a city), under which stands a peacock. Weitzmann suggests that the pyxis represents the coronation feast of Matthew and Eirene, accompanied by their eldest son, John (Matthew's co-emperor from 1356). According to the scholar, the second group (marked "John," "Eirene," and "Andronikos") represents John VI, his wife Eirene, and their grandson, the future Andronikos IV.[1241] Nevertheless, the opinions of scholars regarding the identities of the figures differ. According to the interpretation of Nicholas Oikonomides[1242] and Cecily Hilsdale, the pyxis commemorates

1234 See also Nicol (1972B), 246 f.
1235 Failler (1973), 90.
1236 *Kantakouzenos* III, 269 f. (IV,37). *Gregoras* III, 188 f. (IV,25). Nicol (1968), 81 f.
1237 *Gregoras* III, 188 f. (XXVIII,19). Nicol (1972B), 247. Muratore (1906), 240.
1238 The location of the coronation is confirmed by Nikephoros Gregoras (*Gregoras* III, 204 (XXVIII,43).
1239 *Kantakouzenos* III, 275 f. (IV,38). *Gregoras* III, 204 (XXVIII,43). Nicol (1968), 82, 114 (see also fn. 18).
1240 *Gregoras* III, 204 (XXVIII,42).
1241 For further explanations, details, and literature on this interesting object, see Weitzmann (1972), 77–82, for the passage related to Eirene and her family, 79. For a detailed reproduction of the pyxis (from different sides), see plates LII, LIII (in the back of the book).
1242 Oikonomides (1977).



Ill. 9: *The ivory pyxis. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, D.C.*

the installation of John VII and Eirene Gattilusio in Thessalonike in 1403 with one triad representing John VII, Eirene, and their son Andronikos and the other depicting Manuel II, his wife Helene, and their son John.[1243] There is nothing in the sources to indicate which theory is correct. It is also possible that the pyxis was made to commemorate the coronation of Matthew and Eirene and then reused (and possibly adjusted) to mark the later settlement between the two branches of the Palaiologan family.

While the patronage of the pyxis remains uncertain, at around the same time, Eirene sponsored the making of an icon known as the *Staurotheke*, a magnificent silver cast depicting the Crucifixion. The external part bears images of the Crucified Christ, the Theotokos, John the Evangelist, and a crowd of men and women. The walls of Jerusalem can be seen in the background, and there are three soldiers sitting at Christ's feet. On the left, right, and bottom of the frame are seven scenes from the Passion of Christ, divided by precious stones on silver tablets. On the inside is a magnificent cross covered in silver and bearing the body of Christ. Next to it stand St. Constantine and his mother Helena.[1244] An inscription on the

1243 Hilsdale (2014), 210 f. (figs. 4.0 a-b).

1244 For images, see Jorga (1930), plaques II, III (in the back of the publication). This splendid object, now preserved in Venice, later came into the possession of the prominent Byzantine scholar and theologian, Cardinal Bessarion, who became a Catholic following the Council of Florence (1449) and spent the rest of his life in the West.

support of the phylactery bears the words: "Eirene Palaiologina, the daughter of the fourth brother of the emperor, decorated this cross, which the world prostrates itself before, with silver, as a petition for her salvation and for the forgiveness of her sins."[1245]

After their coronation, Matthew and Eirene probably remained in the capital for several months. In late summer, they sailed with John VI to Tenedos in order to negotiate and make peace with (as Kantakouzenos maintains) or capture (according to Gregoras) John V. The expedition proved a failure, for the local populace was determined in their support of the Palaiologan emperor, who refused to meet with his adversaries. The Kantakouzenes had no option but to quit the island. John VI then took Matthew and Eirene to Ainos, and from there, they proceeded to their residence in Adrianople.[1246]

No new dynasty for Byzantium

Although the young couple had finally arrived at the pinnacle of power, their rule was almost immediately curtailed when, in November 1354, John V entered the Byzantine capital and John VI abdicated. Despite an agreement negotiated by John VI stating that Matthew would remain emperor in Adrianople and the area of Rhodope for life,[1247] the conflict between the two young emperors continued. In the spring of 1355, John V and Matthew drew up another agreement, but it was never implemented.[1248]

In 1356, the tide of events began to turn against the Kantakouzenes. In Matthew's absence, John V succeeded in entering the Byzantine fortress of Gratianoupolis in the Rhodope Mountains, where Eirene and four of her children had sought safety. (Eirene's eldest daughter, Theodora, was in the capital at the time, receiving an education from her grandmother Eirene in the Nunnery of Kyra Martha.) Without causing any injury to Eirene or her family, John sent them into custody on Tenedos.[1249] Later the same year, the men of Caesar Vojihna, the governor of Drama, captured Matthew Kantakouzenos. John V ransomed him, prevented his overzealous jailors from putting out his eyes, and sent him to join his wife and children on Tenedos. Sometime later, perhaps in an effort to prevent their escape, the

1245 Jorga (1930), 69: "Τὸν κοσμοπροσκυνητὸν στ[αυ]ρικὸν τύπον ἀργύρῳ κοσμεῖ Δ (?) ἀδελφοῦ βασιλέως εἰρήνη θυγάτηρ παλαιολογίνα σωτηρίας ἔντευξιν, λύτρον πταισμάτων."

1246 For further details, see *Kantakouzenos* III, 281–284 (IV,39), 292 (IV,40), 308 (IV,42). *Gregoras* III, 236 f. (XXIX,19). Nicol (1968), 83, fn. 22, 114 f.

1247 *Kantakouzenos* III, 292 (IV,40), 308 (IV,42). Nicol (1968), 115.

1248 For details on this agreement, see *Kantakouzenos* III, 309 (IV,42). Nicol (1968), 115 f., see also fn. 22. For the new agreement, see Nicol (1972B), 256.

1249 *Kantakouzenos* III, 331 (IV,45).

entire family was placed under guard at Lesbos, where they became the responsibility of Francesco Gattilusio, the brother-in-law of John V.[1250]

The sources reveal that Matthew and Eirene still had not lost all of their supporters at this point. A noble member of the Kantakouzene household, a man called Zeianos, masterminded a scheme to capture Helene Palaiologina, the wife of John V, and her children in order to force the emperor to release Matthew and his family. The conspiracy failed,[1251] and John Kantakouzenos finally persuaded his son to give up the crown.

In December 1357, the members of the imperial family, senators, and important representatives of the Orthodox Church (including Patriarch Kallistos of Constantinople and Patriarch Lazaros of Jerusalem) gathered in Epibatai. In a solemn ceremony, Matthew renounced his privileges as emperor and took off his red shoes.[1252] In return for his oath of loyalty to John V,[1253] he maintained a prominent position at the Byzantine court, being second in honor only to the emperor and the emperor's eldest son, Andronikos. John V then made Matthew's eldest son, John, a *despot* and bestowed on his second son, Manuel, the title of *sebastokrator*.[1254]

Death concealed

Whether Eirene participated in the debasement of this occasion remains uncertain because at some point after her imprisonment on Tenedos and Lesbos in 1356, her name disappears quietly from the sources. Five years after this event, Matthew decided to leave Constantinople and join his brother Manuel in Mistra.[1255] While his parents[1256] and, apparently, his daughter Helena[1257] accompanied him to the Peloponnese, the name of his wife is conspicuously missing. Because one of the chief historians of this era, John Kantakouzenes, would have journeyed south with Eirene, it is improbable that he would have failed to make note of her presence. The time and circumstances of Eirene's death remain unknown as does the place of her burial. As the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* does not mention her name, it seems that she passed away after her husband gave up his claim to the imperial crown (the reason both he and his wife lost the right to be inscribed into the list of pious emperors

1250 *Kantakouzenos* III, 319–340 (IV, 44–47). See also Miller (1913), 409. The imprisonment of the family is also confirmed by John V's letter to Pope Innocent VI of November 7, 1357. *Life of St. Peter Thomas*, 78. Nicol (1972B), 257.

1251 *Kantakouzenos* III, 341–345 (IV,47).

1252 *Kantakouzenos* III, 357 (IV,49). Nicol (1972B), 257. Oikonomides (1975), 114.

1253 For the text of the oath, see *MM* I, CXCIV, 448–450.

1254 *Kantakouzenos* III, 340–358 (IV,47–49).

1255 For details, see Nicol (1972B), 257.

1256 *Kantakouzenos* III, 358 ff. (IV,49). *Chalkokondyles*, 37 f. (I). Nicol (1968), 117 f.

1257 Nicol (1968), 160, for sources, see fn. 14.

and empresses) in December 1357 and before 1361, when she was absent from the party that accompanied her husband to the Morea. Later Italian historians, including Theodore Spandounes,[1258] suggested that Matthew eventually married a Serbian princess. Though modern scholars have contested these accounts, it does seem likely that Eirene predeceased her husband.

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Eirene Palaiologina's life represents an interesting paradox. Her name rarely appears in the primary sources, yet from the biographies of the people around her (especially those of her father and husband), we learn that her life was colorful - even dramatic. On one hand, she was a member of the imperial family and from her early years as the cherished daughter of the governor of Thessalonike, she went on to receive the crown from the hands of her husband in the Blacherns Church. She also saw her sons achieve important positions at court. On the other hand, although nothing indicates her involvement in political intrigue, she was repeatedly imprisoned by her relatives and may have spent more time in custody than any other empress of her time. Since the chronicles present Eirene as the mere passive object of other people's actions, her image must remain that of a private woman with a taste for religious art, who rarely stepped into the public eye.

1258 *Spandounes*, 144. DuCange (1680), 261. Nicol (1968), 121.

X Maria of Bulgaria: The Itinerant Empress (1376 – after 1400)

Introduction

When the Second Civil War ended in 1347, the Byzantine Empire experienced a brief period of peace within its borders; however, the conflict between the Palaiologos and Kantakouzenos dynasties resurfaced a few years later. In November 1354, John V Palaiologos entered Constantinople, and this time his father-in-law, John VI Kantakouzenos, resolved not to oppose him. Instead, he relinquished the throne and became a monk. For another two years, John V had to contend with Matthew, the son of John VI and a crowned emperor in his own right, who refused to give up his claim to the imperial throne after his father's abdication.

Looking for a way to stabilize his reign so that he could concentrate on internal affairs, John V gave his sister Maria in marriage to Francesco Gattilusio and offered his new brother-in-law the island of Lesbos as her dowry.[1259] As he also required military aid against the Turks and wished to show gratitude to the Bulgarian tsar Ivan Alexander,[1260] who had supported him throughout the Second Civil War, John requested Keraca (also Kyratza or Kyraca),[1261] Ivan's daughter, as a bride for his firstborn son, Andronikos IV.[1262] The union also afforded an opportunity to secure the northern border of the Byzantine Empire.

Little is known about the princess's childhood. Her father had divorced his first wife, Theodora of Wallachia, by whom he had three sons and one daughter, in order to marry a beautiful Jewess named Sara, who received the name Theodora upon her conversion to Christianity. By her, the tsar had two more sons and three (four?) daughters, the second of whom was Keraca. Just before the princess's departure for Constantinople, a manuscript known as the *Tetraevangelion of Tsar Ivan Alexandur*[1263] was produced in Tarnovo. It contained an image of the tsar's family, including a charming young girl with blond hair, who was to become the bride of the imperial heir (see Ill. 10).

On August 17, 1355,[1264] the proposed union of Andronikos and Keraca of Bulgaria received the blessing of an Orthodox synod presided over by Patriarch Kallistos I,

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1259 *Gregoras* III, 554 (XXXVII,46). *Doukas*, 67 (XI,3), 73 (XII,5). For further sources and literature, see *Dölger, Regesten* V, 41, n. 3043.

1260 For details on the policy, ideology, and donor portraits of Ivan Alexander of Bulgaria, see Bakalova (1986), 19–53.

1261 *PLP*, n. 16891. For details on Maria's family, see Božilov (1985), 153. Papadopoulos (1938), 81. Jireček (1876), 321. For sources, see also Moravcsik (1958) II, 182.

1262 *PLP*, n. 21438.

1263 British Library, Add. 39627, fols. 2v, 3r. For details, see also Bakalova (1986), 44–47.

1264 *MM* I, 432 f., n. 185. *Dölger, Regesten* V, 41, n. 3047. Halecki (1930), 51. Barker (1969), 5.



Ill. 10: *The Tetraevangelion of Tsar Ivan Alexandur. The illumination depicts the daughters and son-in-law of the tsar, including the future Byzantine empress, Maria of Bulgaria (Keraca) (second from the right). British Library, Add. 39627, fols. 2v, 3r.*

and a written confirmation was sent to the parents of the bride. The agreement also contained a clause stating that the two countries would come to one another's aid against non-Christians,[1265] mainly the Ottomans.

1265 *Dölger, Regesten* V, 41, ns. 3044, 3046. For the text of the document, see *MM* I, 432 f., n. 185. *Darrouzès, Regestes* V, 316 f., n. 2381.

The history of the Bulgarian realm reaches back to the seventh century when the Bulgarian khans founded an empire in the northeastern Balkans. In the early thirteenth century, Bulgarian dominance reached its zenith under Tsar Ivan Asen II (1218–1241), who acquired the imperial title and a patriarchate for the Bulgarian church[1266] while his capital, Tarnovo, became a magnificent city with palaces and churches to which the tsar brought the relics of important Bulgarian saints: St. Ivan Rilsky, St. Petka of Tarnovo, and St. Michael Voinik. The death of Ivan Asen II plunged Bulgaria into a period of instability with the frequent passing of power from one ruler to another until the Šišmans ascended the throne in 1323. The first ruler of this dynasty, Michael III, made peace with Byzantium and married Theodora, the sister of Andronikos III. Despite this promising beginning, Bulgaria attacked Byzantium several times in the following years (requiring the repeated mediation of Maria-Rita of Armenia, which was described in the chapter on her life). Michael died fighting the armies of Stephan III Dečanski, the king of Serbia, in the Battle of Velbužd in 1330. His nephew, Ivan Alexander (1331–1371), was chosen to rule in his stead. Under his reign Bulgaria experienced a period of peace. Ivan Alexander forged friendly ties with Wallachia when he married Theodora, the daughter of Prince Basarb I. In 1331, Bulgaria made peace with Serbia, whose new ruler, Stephan Uroš IV Dušan, married Ivan Alexander's daughter Helene. A year later, the tsar concluded a peace treaty with Byzantium and engaged his son to the emperor's daughter. Together with his new Byzantine family and his Serbian son-in-law, Ivan Alexander was able to defeat the Tatars (Mongols) and prevent their further attacks on his realm.[1267]

In constant contact (and frequent conflict) with the Byzantine Empire, the Bulgarians created a distinctive culture, influenced in numerous ways by their neighbors to the south. Bulgarian court titles were copied from Byzantium as were the dress and regalia of the ruler.[1268] Laws emulating Byzantine usage were written down in both *Nomos georgikos* (regulating agricultural matters) and the *Kormčaja kniga* (which preserved the canons of the councils along with the commentaries of Byzantine canonists). The Bulgarian church was firmly established within the Orthodox Church, and its monks built their own center on the Holy Mountain of Athos, the Zographou Monastery. In the fourteenth century, Bulgarian monks, especially the influential Theodosios of Tarnovo (d. ca. 1363), brought to Bulgaria the new teaching of hesychasm. At the same time, Bogomil teachings were also disseminated in Bulgaria.

The child bride

Keraca was born around 1349 and had five siblings: Ivan Šišman, Ivan Asen V, Kera Thamara (married to the Serbian prince Constantine Dragaš and later to

1266 Rychlík (2000), 99.
1267 Rychlík (2000), 119–123. Härtel–Schönfeld (1998), 61 ff.
1268 Rychlík (2000), 102 f. Härtel–Schönfeld (1998), 56 f.

the Ottoman sultan Murad I), Desislava, and Vasilissa.[1269] She also had three half brothers from her father's first marriage: Michael Asen IV, Ivan Asen IV, and Ivan Sracimir.[1270]

Keraca grew up at a court that was open to scholars and artists, for Ivan Alexander was a great lover of books and a patron of the arts. During his reign, many richly decorated manuscripts were produced, including a translation of the Psalter, the Gospels (*The Gospels of Tsar Ivan Alexander*), and the *Chronicle of Constantine Manasses.* The scholars of the Tarnovo literary school introduced orthographic and stylistic reforms and translated a number of works, especially theological ones. Under Ivan Alexander, architecture and painting flourished (preserved in the churches of Zemen, Bojana, and Ivanovo) as did music.[1271] The sources do not mention whether the princess received an education in Bulgaria. As she left Tarnovo at the age of nine, she probably did not profit overly much from any contact with the scholars and artists connected with her father's court.

In the spring of 1356, the Bulgarian princess set out for the Byzantine capital along with a large retinue of relatives and officials. Eirene Palaiologina,[1272] a sister of John V, was one of her traveling companions. Widowed after twenty years of marriage to the Bulgarian tsar Michael Asen IV, Eirene had no children; therefore, she had decided to spend the rest of her days with her family in Constantinople.[1273] The tsarina's presence (as someone who knew the Bulgarian court, the ruling family and, presumably, the Bulgarian language) must have been a great comfort to the little princess.

Cecily Hennessy has recently made a persuasive argument for Keraca as the recipient of the so-called *Vatican Epithalamion,* a small volume written and illustrated for an imperial bride.[1274] If the booklet was indeed created for the Bulgarian princess,[1275] it would reveal important information related to her coming to Byzantium. According to its text and illuminations, the princess, whom Leslie Burbaker described in her study as "slight, [and who] raises her hands in supplication and is bareheaded,"[1276] sailed with a large entourage of relatives and members of the nobility[1277] and was welcomed by seventy of the most illustrious members of the imperial family and court. One of them, especially chosen for this

1269 Božilov (1985), 192–235.
1270 Härtel–Schönfeld (1998), 63.
1271 Härtel–Schönfeld (1998), 64 ff.
1272 *PLP*, n. 91851.
1273 On Eirene's arrival in Constantinople, see *Gregoras* III, 557 (XXXVII,51).
1274 For full argumentation, see Hennessy (2006).
1275 Strzygowski (1901), 550. Previous scholarship believed the booklet had been created for Anna-Agnes of France, the bride of Alexios II Komnenos. See especially Jeffreys (1981).
1276 For the description of the image of the princess in the *Vatican Epithalamion*, see Brubaker (2018), 152.
1277 Strzygowski (1901), 552.

purpose by the emperor, dressed her in the purple robe and shoes. Her transformation into an imperial bride took place in a beautifully decorated tent, where she was later visited by her future sister-in-law Eirene, a girl of nearly her own age. The booklet depicts the two princesses sitting on a couch together embracing one another. Despite the requirements of ritual, the ruling couple apparently believed it would be less overwhelming for the young girl to spend the first day in her new home making friends with a girl her own age. (Their thoughtfulness certainly challenges the general conception of a medieval lack of empathy towards children.) Only on the following day were the Bulgarian princess and her relatives received by the emperor, apparently in the imperial palace.[1278] The *Vatican Epithalamion* thus served as a lovely welcome gift for the young bride, one which she may have received before her arrival. Besides being a gift, the booklet also served as a source of information. Using pictures, it explained to the foreign-born princess some of the rituals that would take place on her arrival in the Byzantine Empire.[1279]

Soon after coming to Constantinople, Keraca wed John's eight-year-old heir, Andronikos,[1280] who had already been proclaimed emperor. They were the youngest imperial couple in the history of the late empire. As a member of the Orthodox Church, the princess was not rebaptized nor did she have to take part in the conversion rituals that were usually required of a non-native princess prior to her wedding. Her name, however, was changed to Maria.

Even though the sources do not offer any information on the princess's first years at the Byzantine court, it is safe to assume that she was educated along with the other children of the imperial family, most probably under the auspices of her learned mother-in-law, Empress Helene Palaiologina. As her sister-in-law is known to have received a solid education (including reading and maybe writing[1281]), it is likely that Maria was given the same opportunities. The future husband and wife grew up together, and Maria apparently became deeply attached to Andronikos as she was later willing to follow him into war, exile, and prison. Her affection was a blessing because her life with Andronikos would bring her many disappointments, one of which would be their difficulty in conceiving a child. Though rarely separated, Andronikos and Maria had only one known child, the future John VII, who was born in 1370 after fourteen years of marriage.

1278 Strzygowski (1901), 553.

1279 These rituals are discussed in greater detail in the second part of this study, where an entire chapter is devoted to the transformation of a princess or noblewoman into an empress.

1280 Wirth (1962), 38.

1281 *Machairas* I, 328, (trans.) 329.

Blinding of husband and son

Much of Maria's life was shaped by the audacious acts and dramatic fate of her husband. Though allegedly strong and handsome,[1282] this complicated man had a troubled relationship with his father and a burning desire for the throne. The first recorded clash between Andronikos (who was twenty-two at the time) and his father dates to 1370 when the Venetian authorities decided to detain John V in Venice until he repaid at least part of the large Byzantine debt. The emperor requested assistance, but Andronikos, who was governing the empire in his father's absence, refused.[1283] It was his younger brother Manuel who quickly gathered what funds were available and went to their father's rescue.[1284] John was then able to return to Constantinople, but it was not long before another conflict erupted between him and his eldest son.

In 1373, Andronikos IV made a pact with Savci bey (or Ismael Celebi), the son of Sultan Murad I,[1285] and together they rebelled against their fathers. The time must have appeared fortuitous to the young emperor as his father was away with the sultan on a military expedition in Asia Minor. The young men had clearly overestimated their strength, however. Andronikos lost a decisive battle against his father's troops on May 25 and was forced to surrender in the Anthyros Fortress (apparently in the vicinity of Constantinople) five days later.[1286] Maria followed her husband on this campaign and she was present in the fortress at the time of his capitulation. The anonymous chronicle describing the event informs us that she was seized along with Andronikos and taken to the capital.[1287]

There, the young emperor found himself in a very serious situation. The sultan had his son blinded and executed in September of the same year and insisted that both conspirators be punished in an exemplary fashion.[1288] John V, as the sultan's vassal, was in a weaker position politically and had no choice but to have his son and his three-year-old grandson blinded. The operation was performed with great care, and both Andronikos and John later partially recovered their sight, a fact the Spanish traveler Clavijo ascribed to Maria's devoted care.[1289] In addition to the physical punishment, John V formally disinherited his eldest son and had his second son, Manuel, proclaimed emperor instead. It is not difficult to imagine how the cruel treatment not only of her husband but also of the child for whom she had waited for so long affected Maria. Because the sources do not allude to

1282 *Doukas*, 71 (XII,1).
1283 For a more detailed account, see Barker (1969), 12.
1284 Barker (1969), 13.
1285 See *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 95, ns. 24. Nicol (1972B), 288. Loenertz (1939).
1286 On the dating of this event, see the discussion of sources and secondary literature in Barker (1969), 21, fn. 48.
1287 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 95, ns. 24–26.
1288 Nicol (1972B), 288.
1289 *Clavijo*, 86. *Doukas*, 73 (XII,2).

her character or temperament, her reaction to the loss of her imperial status is less clear; however, this deprivation proved to be temporary.

From the Ottoman court to the throne in Constantinople

Following their capture, the young family was imprisoned in the Anemas Tower[1290] and, later, probably transferred to the less austere conditions of the Kauleas Monastery.[1291] Their release did not follow a reconciliation between father and son but was a consequence of the political struggles between Byzantium and the Italian republics of Genoa and Venice. In order to be released from his imprisonment in 1370, John V had had to promise to cede the island of Tenedos to Venice to repay an old debt. The island, which was situated near the entrance to the Sea of Marmara, was of great strategic importance. In exchange for such a prize, the Venetians were willing to give the emperor 30, 000 ducats and return the Byzantine crown jewels, which had been pawned by John's mother in the course of the Second Civil War. Venetian ships sailed to Constantinople in the spring of 1376 to finalize the agreement; however, the transfer of Tenedos would have seriously damaged Genoese interests in the area. In July of that same year, agents from Genoa helped Andronikos and his family escape from prison,[1292] hoping to capitalize on the gratitude of the young emperor should he reclaim the throne.[1293] Maria accompanied her husband to Galata,[1294] where Andronikos made an appeal to the sultan for military aid. Murad I gladly accepted the proffered role of "maker of Byzantine emperors," particularly after Andronikos promised to surrender Gallipolis,[1295] which had been recovered from the Turks by Amadeo of Savoy ten years earlier. With the aid of the Turkish army and his Genoese allies, Andronikos seized Constantinople on August

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1290 *Doukas* (*Doukas*, 73 (XII,2)) and *Ekthesis Chronike* (*Ekthesis Chronike*, 11–13) name the Anemas Tower as the only place of imprisonment of the young imperial couple. A single note (*Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 612, n. 45, for commentary see *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* II, 307, fn. 38) claims that Andronikos and Maria were held in the Palace of Aetos. Unless Aetos was a transitory place of confinement, the Tower of Anemas seems the more probable site of Andronikos's first imprisonment not only because it is mentioned by two sources but also because it was in this tower that Andronikos IV placed his father and brothers after his successful *coup d'état* in 1376. On the Anemas Tower itself, see Barker (1969), 457.

1291 MS. 3632 of the University of Bologna. For the translated text, see also Loenertz (1939), 343. For a detailed debate of this question, see Barker (1969), 24, especially fn. 58. Dölger (1961), 331, fn. 6. For a mention of the monastery, see Janin (1953), 44.

1292 According to *Lampros, Short chronicles* (n. 47, p. 81), the couple fled from the Monastery of Kauleas.

1293 *Doukas*, 73 (XII,3). *Chalkokondyles* I, 55. For further details, see Nicol (1972B), 289.

1294 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 183, 20. *Loenertz, Chronicon breve*, 209, n. 14. See Barker (1969), 24.

1295 For a detailed discussion of this visit, sources, and literature, see Barker (1969), 458.

12, 1376, and proceeded to establish his authority.[1296] He imprisoned his father and younger brothers Manuel and Theodore, all of whom had been captured during the conquest of the city, in the Anemas Tower and promised to give Tenedos to the Genoese. He also inaugurated a new patriarch. Maria's whereabouts during this time are uncertain. She may have been at the military camp, or she may have been waiting in Galata for news of her husband. Once she received word of his triumph, she joined him in Constantinople.

Only one source mentions Maria in the period that followed. *Vita Caroli Zeni* is a romantic narrative describing the life of the Venetian admiral Carlo Zeno. As for the context of the empress's story, in October 1376, Andronikos IV was away from the capital preparing to hand Tenedos over to his Genoese allies. The Venetians, who also desired the island, were eager to prevent this transfer from taking place. They not only seized Tenedos but also dispatched Carlo Zeno to facilitate the escape of John V and his sons. It was then, according to this source, that the watchful Maria emerged on the scene. She caught the jailor's wife, who was carrying the messages, and had her tortured. The poor woman ultimately betrayed the plans of the Venetian captain and foiled the rescue attempt.[1297] While the credibility of this particular story is difficult to establish, it is true that John and his sons remained in the Anemas Tower for another two years before they managed to escape.[1298] For Maria, however, these were the years of triumph. On October 18, 1377, an imperial coronation took place. When he had received his crown from Patriarch Makarios, Andronikos (who had been proclaimed emperor as a child in 1350 but never crowned) turned to place the imperial diadem not only on the head of his wife but also on that of his son, whose future imperial claims he wished to secure.[1299]

Besieged in Galata and widowed in Selymbria

The reign of the young couple was far from ideal. Venice occupied Tenedos in 1376 and attacked Constantinople the following year. In addition to his difficulties with the Italian republics, Andronikos still had to reward his other ally, the sultan. To this end, the port city of Gallipolis was returned to the Turks in 1377.[1300] In June 1379, John V, Manuel, and Theodore managed to escape from the Anemas

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1296 *Doukas*, 73 (XII,3). Barker (1969), 27, see also fn. 64.

1297 *Vita Caroli Zeni*, (ed.) Muratori, 215 f., (ed.) Zonta, 12–14. Barker (1962), 234.

1298 Doukas contrived a fantastic story about a Diavolangelos, who helped John and Manuel escape. Once they had left the capital, Andronikos allegedly brought his father back, requested his pardon, and restored him to the throne. *Doukas*, 73 (XII,4).

1299 *Chalkokondyles* I, 57. *Lampros, Short chronicles*, 89. Barker (1969), 29. Nicol (1972B), 290.

1300 Nicol (1972B), 291.

Tower[1301] and fled to the Ottoman sultan, who carefully cultivated the tensions that already existed between the members of the imperial family. Despite the fact that he was now related to Andronikos (having married Maria's sister, Kera Thamara, in 1378), Murad I received the refugees in a friendly manner and equipped them with an army, enabling them to force their way back into Constantinople by July 1.[1302] Andronikos, Maria, and John were forced to flee to Galata, taking with them Andronikos's mother (Helene), his aunts (Maria and Theodora), and his grandfather (John Kantakouzenos) as hostages.[1303] Manuel then lay siege to Galata, which resulted in the imperial family being forced to ration their food supply. Their lives were further endangered when the plague broke out as conditions in the city deteriorated. Finally, in 1381, the two parties came to an agreement. Adronikos was confirmed as heir apparent and received Selymbria as his fief. The family resettled there[1304] and lived quite peacefully for several years. Eventually, however, Andronikos grew discontented with his situation and seized a fortress near Constantinople.[1305] His sudden death, probably of disease, at the age of thirty-seven prevented this last revolt from growing into full-blown civil war.[1306] The body of Andronikos IV was transferred to Constantinople and buried there with all due honors. It is likely that the widowed empress accompanied her husband on his final journey. In 1389, Maria would have received news of the Battle of Kosovo, and she would have watched as Bulgaria, her homeland, gradually fell under Turkish domination.[1307] Sometime before 1390, she took the veil and with it the name Makaria.[1308] The sources do not mention her ever having moved into a convent, which can probably be explained by the events that followed.

Two more journeys

After the death of her husband, Maria focused her attention on her only child and his unenviable position. Although John VII was a crowned emperor and the only son of the late heir apparent, his grandfather clearly preferred his uncle Manuel as successor.[1309] Nevertheless, John VII refused to give up his claim

1301 Manuel Palaiologos mentions his imprisonment in the Anemas Tower in his *Funeral Oration for his Brother Theodore*. See *Manuel, Funeral Oration*, 100–109, see also 108, fn. 27.

1302 *Lampros, Short chronicles*, n. 52, 89. Barker (1969), 35.

1303 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 183, n. 20. (This text does not mention Andronikos's aunt Theodora.) See also Barker (1969), 39, fn. 104. Nicol (1972B), 292.

1304 *Doukas*, 73 (XII,4). Barker (1969), 41. See also fn. 115.

1305 Nicol (1972B), 296.

1306 He died on June 28. For details on his burial place, see Barker (1969), 469 f. Mešanović (1996), 64.

1307 Rychlík (2000), 133 ff.

1308 Lappa-Zizicas (1976), 141.

1309 For the reign of John VII, see Mešanović (1996).

to the throne and sailed to Italy in 1390 to plead his case to the traditional allies of his father, the Genoese. As she used to accompany her husband on his voyages and military ventures, so Maria-Makaria now accompanied her son.[1310] The details of John's negotiations with the Republic of Genoa remain unknown, but they apparently proved successful. The young emperor secured financial support and, with the aid of his Western and his Turkish allies, fought his way into Constantinople on April 14, 1390.[1311] Initially, Maria remained in Italy, perhaps because her son wished her to be out of danger should the enterprise fail. Several months later, the empress-nun received news of her son's victory and departed for Byzantium to join him. Two documents issued by the Venetian senate in the late spring and early summer of 1390 (May–July) provide for the passage of a Byzantine empress through Venice on her way from Milan to Byzantium.[1312] John VII must have had good connections in Italy because his mother traveled under the protection of the powerful Italian prince Gian Galeazzo Visconti, Count of Pavia and Lord of Milan. During July 1390, Maria-Makaria sojourned briefly in Venice; that same month, she boarded a Venetian ship to return to Constantinople.[1313]

John VII's reign in the Byzantine capital proved brief. John V closed himself up in the palace while Manuel promptly acquired ships and support from the Hospitallers of Rhodes.[1314] With their help, he entered Constantinople on September 17, 1390, and John VII and Maria-Makaria were once again driven into exile in Selymbria.[1315] In the following months, the sultan ordered both Manuel and John VII to participate in a military campaign. Maria probably remained in Selymbria, which she governed in her son's absence. In February of the following year, John V, exhausted by a lifetime of fighting and constant misfortune, died in Constantinople. Now, the struggle between uncle and nephew for the imperial throne began in earnest. Having received the news of his father's death (probably from his mother), Manuel secretly left the Ottoman court and returned to Constantinople. Soon afterwards, John VII fled from Bayezid (who at that time or shortly thereafter occupied Selymbria) and came to the Byzantine capital to make peace with his uncle.[1316] Though the sources do not mention her name, it is almost certain that Maria accompanied her son.

1310 For details, see Barker (1962), 232, 234 f.

1311 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 68, n. 21. For details on the struggle of John VII and his grandfather, John V, see Kolias (1952). For further details, see Nicol (1972B), 302. Barker (1969), 72–78. *Majeska, Travellers*, 101 ff., for commentary 408–415.

1312 The text was published in the appendix of Barker (1962), 237 f.

1313 Barker (1969), xxiii, 69 f., see fn. 188 for information on Maria's journey.

1314 Wright (2014), 47.

1315 Nicol (1972B), 303.

1316 *Chalkokondyles* I, 83 f. *Pseudo-Sphrantzes*, 220.

In 1392, she returned to Italy, where Manuel had sent his nephew to seek military aid from the Genoese. Chalkokondyles, however, portrays this seemingly straightforward venture as a trap:

> [John VII] offered his services to his uncle [Manuel II], who sent him to Italy to accomplish what had been suggested. He [Manuel] sent him [John VII] to Genoa, supposedly to ask for help, and [simultaneously] dispatched a secret message to the Genoese asking them to imprison him [John VII].[1317]

As the chronicler states that John "offered his services to his uncle," the passage doubtless refers to John's second voyage to Italy. Manuel's purported treachery, however, is somewhat suspect as the senior emperor would not easily have persuaded the Genoese, traditional allies of his elder brother and nephew, to take John VII captive. Whatever the circumstances, John sailed to Italy with Maria by his side. An inscription in a Gospel Book[1318] that Maria presented to an important Catholic dignitary (Peter Philargos, later Pope Alexander V) during her stay clearly names the donor and states the time of her visit:

> This most holy Gospel Book was given to me, Brother Peter of the order of the least brothers, called by the Italians the Minorites [Franciscans], by the grace of God archbishop of Milan in Liguria, while I was still the bishop of Novara. [I received it] from the exalted and illustrious lady of the Romaioi, Empress Maria, who took the name [in religion] Makaria, after she came with her son, the most exalted and illustrious emperor of the Romaioi, Lord John Palaiologos, to Ticino in Liguria at the time when the most illustrious Duke of Milan, Lord Gian Galeazzo, the Count of Pavia, was ruler and prince of the Ligurians, in the year 1392.[1319]

John's embassy to Italy remains an obscure episode of Byzantine foreign policy. The sources do not report whether the mission was successful, nor do they explain the objectives of John and Maria's visit to Ticino, a small town in Liguria. Whether the Genoese attempted to take the emperor captive as suggested by Chalkokondyles or revealed the plot to John remains unclear as well. Soon after his return to Byzantium, the young emperor fell out with his uncle, and John and Maria were forced to leave the capital. They departed for the Ottoman court, where they reconciled with the sultan, and subsequently resumed their reign and residence in Selymbria.[1320]

1317 *Chalkokondyles* I, 77 f. Translation mine. See also Lappa-Zizicas (1976), 141.

1318 For further details on the manuscript, see Tselikas (1977), 38 ff., n. 30. Sophronios Eustratiades (1911). Lappa-Zizicas (1976).

1319 Lappa-Zizicas (1976), 139–141. The note itself must have been composed between May 17, 1402, and September 3, 1402, (see *ibid.*, 140 f.). See also Sophronios Eustratiades (1911), 273 f.

1320 The Spanish traveler Clavijo states that less than a decade later, the French Marshall Boucicaut found John VII in this city (*Clavijo*, 51 f.).

Although Maria-Makaria's journeys may seem unusual, they were not unique. As described in an earlier chapter, Maria-Rita of Armenia (as the nun Xene) repeatedly traveled and became involved in the political affairs of the empire. Furthermore, Maria-Makaria had good reasons to undertake those strenuous journeys to Italy. First, Selymbria did not offer any lasting protection against the Turks, and after the sultan took the city, Maria apparently had nowhere else to go (especially as her native Bulgaria was also a target of Ottoman aggression). She may also have wanted to stay close to her son, who was the only remaining member of her family. Besides having poor vision, John as yet had no wife to accompany him on his travels, so the absence of a daughter-in-law may have further influenced the empress's decision to travel. (John's marriage to Eirene Gattilusio[1321] appears in the sources in the year 1397 when Francesco II Gattilusio is described as the father-in-law of the young emperor.)[1322]

Empress of Constantinople

In December 1399, Marshall Boucicaut, a French commander sent to assist the Byzantine emperor, traveled to Selymbria and persuaded John VII to make peace with his uncle once again.[1323] This time, the reconciliation was welcomed by Manuel, who had been besieged in the capital city for five years and had decided to look for help in the foremost courts of Europe. The two emperors agreed that John VII would rule Constantinople in Manuel's absence and would become governor of Thessalonike on his return.[1324] Despite their reconciliation, Manuel considered it wise to take his wife and children to the Morea to stay with his brother Theodore during his absence.[1325] Shortly before this (certainly by 1397), John had married Eirene, the daughter of the powerful master of Lesbos, Francesco II Gattilusio. Both Eirene and her mother-in-law followed John to the capital.[1326] As Manuel's mother, Helene Palaiologina, had died in 1396 and John's young wife had no experience with the ceremonies and customs of the Byzantine court, Maria no doubt assumed the position of senior empress.

1321 On the Gattilusio lordship in the Aegean world, see Wright (2014).

1322 Lambros (1913), 249. For an argument that John VII and Eirene Gattilusio married in 1397, see the work of Katsoni (Katsoni (1991)).

1323 Barker offers a detailed discussion of the individual sources, describing the circumstances of this reconciliation. Based on his persuasive argumentation, I accept the testimony of Clavijo (*Clavijo*, 51 f.) as the best informed. For a full argumentation, see Barker (1969), 165, and mainly *Appendix*, XIV, 490–493. Nicol (1972B), 322.

1324 Nicol (1972B), 336 f.

1325 Nicol (1972B), 322.

1326 The move is mentioned in a letter from Patriarch Matthew to the Metropolitan of Kiev. *MM* II, 359 ff., n. 556. *Darrouzès, Regestes* VI, 360 f., n. 3112. For the translation of the text, see Barker (1969), 202 ff., 492.

Three documents preserved in the patriarchal register testify that the empress was not indifferent to the plight of her subjects in the capital, besieged as it had been by Bayezid's troops for more than six years. According to these documents, she and her son provided a dowry for Tzykandylina,[1327] the daughter of a certain Anna Palaiologina[1328] (January 1400). Anna's husband had died young, leaving behind a widow, five children, and a house in Constantinople. The family fortunes had quickly dwindled, and when Anna's second daughter was ready to marry, her mother could provide her with only a very modest dowry. Maria learned of this embarrassing situation, and she and her son decided to sponsor the bride.[1329]

That same year, the empress helped another individual who had fallen on hard times. Sometime at the end of the fourteenth century, a monk named Methodios had rented a small plot of land and a garden from the Church of St. Euphemia. The intermittent sieges of the capital had impoverished him, and he could no longer fulfill his obligations to the church. Under these pressing circumstances, Methodios turned not only to the patriarch but also to Maria-Makaria, who may have played a role in the original agreement (as suggested by Darrouzès[1330]). A simpler explanation for his decision to appeal to the empress-nun might be that she had become known for her compassion.[1331] In March 1400, Patriarch Matthew I, acting as a result of the direct intervention of the empress, confirmed the reduction of Methodios's rent.[1332]

In May of the same year, Maria,[1333] who was the owner of the impoverished Monastery of Bassos,[1334] decided to put a certain John Kallikrinites in charge of the monastery after he promised to bequeath his own private fortune for its renovation.[1335] The official document states that John was a courtier of the empress, a spiritual son of Patriarch Matthew, and a eunuch. This information regarding John's connection to Maria is rare evidence of the fact that late Byzantine empresses,

1327 *PLP*, n. 28132.
1328 *PLP*, n. 21346.
1329 *MM* II, 422, n. 595. *Darrouzès, Regestes* VI, 347 f., n. 3092.
1330 *Darrouzès, Regestes* VI, 365, n. 3116.
1331 For details on the case of Monk Methodios, see *MM* II, 370, n. 560. *Darrouzès, Regestes* VI, 364 f, n. 3116. *PLP*, n. 17608.
1332 See especially ls. 13 ff.
1333 Maria is not mentioned by name but only by her title, *despoina*. While there were other empresses in Byzantium at this time (e.g., the wives of Manuel II and John VII), it is almost without doubt that in 1400 Maria was the one empress who performed charitable deeds. Helene Dragaš, the wife of Manuel II, was with her children in the Peloponnese and Eirene Gattilusio had only recently come to Constantinople, not to mention the fact that no known pious donation is personally connected with her – although this does not rule out charitable donations on her part.
1334 For details on the monastery, see Janin (1969), III, 44–46, 61 f.
1335 *MM* II, 388 f, n. 573. *Darrouzès, Regestes* VI, 374 f., n. 3131.

despite their strained financial circumstances, had courts of their own (even if the size and members remain obscured). Moreover, John Kallikrinites is one of the few eunuchs mentioned in the sources as a servant of a late Byzantine empress. There is no indication, however, that Maria would in any way have depended on his services for communication with people outside the palace, which was frequently the role of eunuchs serving middle Byzantine empresses. John Kallikrinites was most likely a trusted servant, and being a eunuch, he had free access to the empress without the risk of her falling into disrepute. It is also possible that he was a confidant with whom Maria could share her concerns for the future of her son.

Sometime in the course of Bayezid's siege of the Byzantine capital, Maria-Makaria vanishes from the primary sources. Did she live to see the city temporarily relieved of the Turkish threat through the timely attack of the Mongols on the Ottoman Empire in 1402?[1336] Was she there to cheer her son's triumph when he signed a favorable treaty with Sultan Suleiman in 1403[1337] or to depart with him for Lemnos the following summer?[1338] Did she accompany him to Thessalonike to see him take up his position there? There are no answers to these questions because no short chronicle mentions the year of her death or the place where she was buried. As Constantinople was the last place were Maria lived and the name of Maria-Makaria closes the list of pious empresses inscribed in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*,[1339] it is probable that she died in the city around the year 1400 and was buried next to her husband in the Pantokrator Monastery.

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Though the late Byzantine sources only rarely mention Maria, the Bulgarian wife of the intractable emperor Andronikos IV, the terse lines of their narratives reveal a rather unique image of a *despoina*. Maria was a strong woman, who managed to overcome her premature separation from her parents and adjust to a new culture. She spent most of her life on the move, following her husband and son into war, exile, and prison. Maria was also the only late Byzantine empress to repeatedly visit the Ottoman court (in the company of her male relatives). After her husband's early death, she donned the veil but evidently never entered a convent. Probably dressed decorously in the simple attire of a nun, Maria followed her

1336 Nicol (1972B), 326–329.

1337 For details, see Dennis (1967A). Barker (1969), 225. Nicol (1972B), 334.

1338 Nicol (1972B), 336 f.

1339 *Gouillard, Synodikon*, 103. The Feast of Orthodoxy is celebrated on the sixth Sunday before Easter. In respect to the date of Maria's death, it is necessary to mention a faulty piece of information provided by Papadopoulos, who would have us believe that Maria died as the nun Mattheisa in 1390 and was buried in the church in Mesembria (Papadopoulos (1938), 52 f., n. 81). This information however is not supported by the sources which indicate that Maria was present in Italy in 1392 and dispensed charity to the inhabitants of Constantinople as late as 1400 (see, for example, *MM* II, 422, n. 595. *Darrouzès, Regestes* VI, 347 f., n. 3092).

son to the cities of Italy, the lofty palaces of the sultan, and back and forth from Selymbria to Constantinople.

Under the guidance of her learned mother-in-law, Helene Palaiologina, she must have become well acquainted with the language and culture of Byzantium and may have acquired basic skills in reading and writing. Her relationship with Helene, who must have served as a mother figure to the Bulgarian child bride, eventually became strained as the other relationships within the imperial family deteriorated. When Andronikos IV decided to turn against his family, Maria followed him. When the couple wasn't involved in conflict, they were often living in captivity or exile. The death of her husband brought Maria no reprieve because then it was her son who needed her loyalty to win the throne. Perhaps her final years brought some satisfaction, for when Maria of Bulgaria (Keraca) died in Constantinople around the year 1400, she had seen her son on the imperial throne, the Ottoman siege of Constantinople had been lifted, and Sultan Bayezid had been defeated at Ankara.[1340]

The sources never speak of Maria's personality, but the portrait conjured up by the evidence provided shows a courageous lady of great perseverance and stamina, who was mindful of the interests of her family and generous towards those who, like her, had fallen on hard times.

1340 On the condition that she lived until July 1402.

XI Helene Dragaš: Mother of the Last Byzantine Emperors (1392–1450)

In the year 6900 [1392] on the eleventh [day] of the month February, on the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, Manuel was crowned emperor over the Empire with his wife the empress by the holy Patriarch Anthony, and his coronation was wondrous to see.[1341]

Ignatios of Smolensk

Introduction

Unlike most of his predecessors, Manuel II[1342] remained a bachelor until the age of forty. As the second son of the emperor, his marriage was not considered essential for the continuity of the dynasty. When the heir of John V, Andronikos IV, produced a son, the succession of the Palaiologans seemed secure. The situation changed in 1373 when Andronikos allied himself with the son of the sultan and entered into open rebellion against his father, for John V was then forced to disinherit his eldest son and his line and proclaim Manuel successor in his brother's stead.

For the next several years, the new heir to the throne had no time to search for a bride due to ongoing struggles with his brother Andronikos and his nephew John, not to mention the slowly encroaching Turks. However, external circumstances were not the sole cause of Manuel's matrimonial inertia. In his *Dialogue with the Empress-Mother on Marriage,* Manuel argued that having a family would make him vulnerable because his fears for the life and welfare of a wife and children would necessarily be aggravated by the precarious situation of the empire. The emperor's mother eventually refuted his objections and convinced him of the advantages and joys of having a family.[1343] The search for a new empress could begin.

1341 *Majeska, Travellers*, 105, (trans.) 106.

1342 For details on Manuel, see Nicol (1972B), 310–334. Barker (1969). For a list of sources and literature, see *PLP*, n. 21513. On the reign of Manuel II, see Nicol (1972B), 310–333.

1343 For details, see the chapter on Helene Palaiologina (the wife of John V). See also Hilsdale (2014), 279–288.

The Serbian bride

In 1391, Manuel finally claimed his place on the Byzantine throne and, hoping for an alliance against the Turks, decided to look for a bride among the daughters of the Balkan rulers.[1344] His choice fell to Helene,[1345] the only daughter[1346] of a Serbian ruler named Constantine Dragaš and his first wife, whose identity is unknown.

In the high and late Middle Ages, Serbia had become an important power under the Nemanja dynasty, especially under Stephan Uroš IV (1331–1355), who styled himself emperor of the Serbs and the Greeks and who had expressed his intention to conquer the Byzantine Empire after he had himself crowned in 1346.[1347] Serbian culture had been strongly influenced by Byzantium. The Serbian court had adopted the Byzantine system of offices and titles as well as dress and ceremonies. Its rulers published codes of law reflecting Byzantine legal collections (such as *Svetosavska krmčija* or the legal code of Stephan Dušan). As far as literature is concerned, a number of biographies of the rulers of the Nemanja dynasty and hagiographies of the Serbian saints (especially St. Sava) were produced, and towards the end of the fourteenth century, several Byzantine chronicles were translated into Serbian, including the writings of Zonaras, Hamartolos and Manasses, which inspired the composition of the first Serbian historical works. Serbian rulers also built a number of churches, including the Church of St. George in Stare Nagoričino, the Annunciation Church in Gračanica, and the Church of St. Joachim and St. Anna in Studenica.[1348] Later rulers founded important monasteries such as Ravanica and Resava.

After the death of Stephan Dušan IV in 1355, his extensive realm fell apart; in its place, there appeared several smaller principalities headed by influential Serbian nobles. The Dragaš (Dejanović) was one of these families, and they ruled in central Macedonia.[1349] The future Byzantine empress was the granddaughter of the last of the Nemanja princesses, Theodora, who was married to Dejan (Dragaš) and whose sons Jovan and Constantine Dragaš became vassals of the Turks. Constantine (the grandson of Stephan Uroš III and his wife, the Byzantine princess Maria Palaiologina) governed a large territory in the south of the former Serbian

1344 See the comments of Nicol (Nicol (1972B), 312).

1345 *PLP*, n. 21366. For a recent study on the empress, see Marjanović-Dušanić (2014). For further details, see Barker (1969), 99 f., 100, fn. 24. See also Anastasijević (1939). Dabrowska (1996), 39. Reinert (2001), 291 f. For a brief biographical sketch, see also Leszka–Leszka (2017), 373–383. Nicol (1972B), 312.

1346 Marjanović-Dušanić (2014), 121.

1347 Pelikán–Havlíková–Chrobák *et al.* (2004), 71–76.

1348 For further details on culture, see Pelikán–Havlíková–Chrobák *et al.* (2004), 76–86, 98 f., 105 ff., 114 f.

1349 On late medieval Serbian history, see Pelikán–Havlíková–Chrobák *et al.* (2004), 92–117.

Kingdom, including most of the Macedonian territories east of the Vardar River and the formidable fortresses of Rila and Melnik.[1350]

As was often the case with the brides of the emperors, Helene's early life escaped the notice of contemporary historians. The precise year of her birth is unknown, but as she married in 1392 at about the age of twenty, she would have been born around 1372.[1351] The princess's adolescence was marked by the early death of her mother (sometime before 1386) as well as the difficult period following the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 when the army of the Serbian ruler Lazar Hrebeljanović was defeated by Sultan Bayezid I.

Following the death of Helene's mother, her father remarried. He chose as his new wife Eudokia, the widowed daughter of Emperor Alexios III of Trebizond and Theodora Kantakouzene.[1352] Eudokia had led a colorful life and acquired a wealth of cultural experience. She spent her childhood in the court of her father, and from there she entered the harem of the Muslim ruler Tadjeddin Pascha of Sinope and had children by him. When Tadjeddin died (October 24, 1386), she married Constantine Dragaš.[1353] As Eudokia did not have any offspring by her second husband, she would have had the opportunity to be involved in the life of her stepdaughter Helene. Through Eudokia, Helene could have learned the rudiments of the Greek language, and she would have come into direct contact with medieval Greek culture as well, creating a knowledge base that would be a great asset to her when she ascended to the Byzantine throne.

Imperial wedding and coronation

The bride-to-be probably arrived in Constantinople at the beginning of February 1392.[1354] Despite the fact that she was about to marry the emperor of several

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1350 For details on her father and his reign, see Matanov (1997), 118 f. Hadji-Vasiliević (1902). See also Barker (1969) 100, fn. 24. Ostrogorsky (1963). Marjanović-Dušanić (2014), 119–121. Ostrogorsky (1963). Ostrogorsky (1970).

1351 Sideras (1982), 472. According to Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić, she was born in the mid-1370s (Marjanović-Dušanić (2014), 121).

1352 *Grecu, Sphrantzes*, 78–80. *Philippides, Sphrantzes*, 61. For an interesting study on Eudokia and Constantine Dragaš, see Djurić (1984).

1353 To finish Eudokia's story: the princess lost her second husband in May 1395. In September of the same year, she passed through Constantinople, where she collected brides for her brother and nephew. She then escorted them to Trebizond, where she apparently spent the rest of her life. See also *Lampsides, Panaretos*, 81.

1354 Barker (1969), xxiv, for an account of Manuel's marriage, see 99–104. Opinions vary as to the time of Helene's arrival in Constantinople. Barker claims that Helene entered the city on February 7–8, 1392. *Mioni, Cronaca inedita* states that Helene arrived in December 1391 (*Mioni, Cronaca inedita*, 81). Also see *Chalkokondyles* I, 75. Based on the following reference, Schreiner also believed that Helene did not arrive in Constantinople until February 1392. A Genoese account from Pera (Galata) mentions that on February 7/8, 1392: "pro Jacopo de Terdona domicelo

detached territories of unimpressive size,[1355] Helene's entry into the Byzantine capital was celebrated with appropriate magnificence and attended by a representative sample of the city's inhabitants. According to one account, Genoese legates showered Helene with coins worth 16 *hyperpyra* as well as flowers (or confetti – the text is, unfortunately, corrupted) to bid her welcome.[1356]

Despite the festivities that marked her coming, the city itself was only a shadow of its former glory. A medieval travelogue invokes a very somber image of the imperial residence and the inhabitants of Constantinople:

> The Emperor's Palace must have been very magnificent, but now it is in such state that both it and the city show well the evils, which the people have suffered and still endure (. . .). Inside, the house is badly kept, except certain parts where the Emperor, the Empress, and their attendants can live, although cramped for space. The Emperor's state is as splendid as ever, for nothing is omitted from the ancient ceremonies, but properly regarded, he is like a Bishop without a See. (. . .) The inhabitants are not well clad, but sad and poor, showing the hardship of their lot (. . .).[1357]

On February 10, Helene and Manuel were married, and on the following day, Patriarch Anthony crowned the imperial couple in the Great Church, Hagia Sophia.[1358] Eyewitness accounts from several authors[1359] allow for the following

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domini potestatis, et sunt qui projecti fuerunt super capud domine imperatricis in eius adventu que[m] fecit in Constantinopoli." *Archivio di San Giorgio*, f. 69v., (ed.) Belgrano, 161. Barker (1969), 102, fn. 26. See also Schreiner (1968), 72. Papadopoulos (1938), 55 f. (Papadopoulos's chronology is sometimes misleading as he places the wedding of Manuel and Helene to around 1393 when it actually took place in February 1392.)

1355 Barker (1969), 85.

1356 For a detailed discussion, see Barker (1969), 102, fn. 26. See also Reinert (1994). Hilsdale (2014), 278 f.

1357 *Vasiliev, Pero Tafur*, 111 ff.

1358 *Mioni, Cronaca inedita*, for texts see 75, n. 21, (trans. and notes), 81. See also *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* II, 348. See the detailed discussion of Barker (Barker (1969), 102, fns. 26, 27). In fn. 27, Barker plausibly argues that the wedding and coronation were divided into two days. See also Schreiner (1968), 72 f. For a discussion of the date of the coronation with ample literature, see *Majeska, Travellers*, 416 f. For further discussion of the coronation ceremony and its various aspects, see *Majeska, Travellers*, 420–436. Several important scholars argue that this was Manuel's second coronation, the first having been performed in 1373. For details, see *Majeska, Travellers*, 419. Barker (1969), 104. Schreiner (1968), 74 f. Reinert (2001), 293.

1359 For the edited and translated text describing the coronation rituals of the late Byzantine emperors, see *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 214–242. For further comments, consult the older edition and translation of Verpeaux, *Verpeaux, Ps.-Kodinos*, 353–361. For the testimony of Ignatios of Smolensk, see Schreiner (1968), 81–85, and especially *Majeska, Travellers*, 105–113, 416–437, which also offers many details, literature,

reconstruction of the event: early in the morning, crowds of people flooded the church. While the men remained in the nave, the women entered the gallery. From there they could watch the ceremony unobserved from behind silk curtains. The scene was certainly magnificent, for besides the Byzantine aristocracy, Latin legates from Pera, Constantinople, Venice, and Genoa as well as professional singers wearing magnificent outfits of damask and silk filled the prominent places. Under the choir stood two high[1360] 'golden' thrones elevated on a podium covered in red silk. According to *Pseudo-Kodinos*, all the empresses present at the coronation would have sat on thrones arranged on the podium. The fact that there were only two thrones at this ceremony suggests that, if she was present, the senior empress preferred to watch from the imperial box.[1361]

As most of the ceremony focused on the figure of the emperor, the following description seeks to highlight the parts that concerned the empress. On entering the church, Emperor Manuel changed into his festive robe and donned a diadem and the crown of a *caesar*. He then escorted Helene, who descended from the imperial box,[1362] to meet him in her purple robe and wearing a *stephanos*[1363] to the podium and they took their seats on the prepared thrones.[1364] Manuel later followed Patriarch Anthony to the ambo (an elevated platform[1365]), where the

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and helpful comments. For a French translation (though sometimes faulty), see *Khitrowo*, 143–147. See also Nicol (1972B), 312.

1360 The thrones in Hagia Sophia were apparently higher than the thrones ordinarily used by the emperor and empress in the palace. For details, see *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 218 (VII), 219, fn. 630. The fact that there were two thrones is mentioned by Ignatios of Smolensk (*Majeska, Travellers*, 107).

1361 *Pseudo-Kodinos* states that the mother of the emperor about to be crowned was to be present on the podium already wearing her crown (unlike her daughter-in-law). See *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 218 ff. (VII).

1362 In his reconstruction of the coronation ceremony, Majeska suggests that prior to ascending the podium, the empress "was in the galleries of the church, probably in the imperial box of the *gynaeceum*, her customary place during services in the Great Church, and descended to the narthex, where she was met by her husband and conducted by him to their thrones on the dais on the south side of the nave." *Majeska, Travellers*, 426.

1363 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 220 (VII). The text does not offer any details on the appearance of the *stephanos* (also called the *stemmatogyrion*) worn by the empresses but describes the *stephanos* worn by other dignitaries as being embellished by pearls and precious stones with small arches either on four sides (the *stephanos* of the despot, the son of the emperor) or in the front only (the *stephanos* worn by a despot who is not a son of the emperor or by the *sebastokrator* or *caesar*). See also *ODB* III, 1952. Based on these descriptions, we may assume that the *stephanos* of the late Byzantine empresses was a less elaborate form of crown, possibly resembling a diadem.

1364 *Majeska, Travellers*, 109. *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 218 (VII).

1365 For details, see *ODB* I, 75 f.

patriarch blessed and crowned him. Afterwards, the patriarch gave the emperor a second crown[1366] and instructed him to crown his wife, the empress.

In the meantime, two deacons had come to Helene,[1367] bowed down to her, and bid her to follow them. She descended from the podium and walked to the lower platform known as the *solea*.[1368] Manuel likewise descended from the ambo to the *solea*, where he approached his wife and placed the crenellated crown worn by empresses[1369] on her bowed head.[1370] He also put into her right hand a golden scepter set with precious jewels and pearls (a *baion*). Together they performed a *proskynesis*[1371] in front of the sanctuary and returned to the podium, where they resumed their seats on the thrones.[1372] Next, they listened to chanted acclamations and praises performed first by one of the church deacons and then by professional singers, who wished 'many years' to the emperor and his new wife, "*augousta* of the Romans."[1373] The acclamations were followed by the Divine Liturgy, during which the empress remained seated. According to the *Anonymous Tractate*, the epistle and gospel readings selected for the occasion, possibly according to the wishes

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1366 The accounts vary regarding when and how the crown of the empress was brought. Ignatios of Smolensk claims that Helene's crown was carried to the patriarch along with that of the emperor on a covered tray (*Majeska, Travellers*, 109). Kantakouzenos (*Kantakouzenos* I, 199 (I,41)) and *Pseudo-Kodinos* (*Pseudo-Kodinos*, 224 (VII)) claim that it was brought by two relatives or servants of the empress after the patriarch had crowned the emperor.

1367 According to *Pseudo-Kodinos*, the empress was to be accompanied by her close relatives or by two eunuchs if no relatives were present, which may have been a common situation among empresses of foreign origin (*Pseudo-Kodinos*, 224 (VII), 225, fn. 651).

1368 According to the *ODB*, the *solea* was "the part of the raised sanctuary platform that lies outside the *templon* [the screen separating the nave from the sanctuary]." For details on the *solea*, see *ODB* III, 1923. On the *templon*, see *ibid.*, 2023.

1369 For further details, see *Majeska, Travellers*, 425 f. *Pseudo-Kodinos* merely states that the crown of the empress had a different shape than the one worn by the emperor (*Pseudo-Kodinos*, 224 (VII)).

1370 *Majeska, Travellers*, 109. According to *Pseudo-Kodinos* the empress was to make a *proskynesis* in front of her husband following the coronation in order to show her subjection to him (*Pseudo-Kodinos*, 224 (VII)). However, the account of Ignatios of Smolensk does not mention this detail. It may not have been clearly visible. It is also possible that the empress bowed down or kneeled in order to receive the crown, in which case there would have been no need for a separate *proskynesis*.

1371 A gesture that may have ranged from a simple bow to full prostration though the latter is less probable on this particular occasion. For details on *proskynesis*, see *ODB* III, 1738 f.

1372 It is possible that in the course of this particular coronation, the empress did not make a *proskynesis* to her husband as prescribed by the coronation order of *Pseudo-Kodinos;* instead, both made a *proskynesis* at the altar.

1373 *Verpeaux, Ps.-Kodinos*, 357.

of Patriarch Anthony,[1374] were from *Hebrews* 12 and *John* 10 (the Parable of the Good Shepherd).[1375] When the time came for the Holy Communion, two deacons approached the empress, bowed down, and indicated that she should follow them. There is a record of an incident that took place after Helene had descended from the podium the second time. It seems the crowd tore off the podium's red silk covering and ripped it to pieces (perhaps for souvenirs); however, the disturbance did not interrupt the ceremony. According to Ignatios of Smolensk, Helene entered the altar area through the south door and received Holy Communion while her husband took his portion from the hand of the patriarch at the Throne of Christ.[1376]

When the ecclesiastical part of the ceremony had ended, the imperial couple exited the church[1377] and were showered with small, cross-stamped coins known as *staurata*.[1378] Still wearing their crowns, they rode together to the Great Palace. Their horses were led by the highest officials of the court: the *despots*, the *sebastokrators*, and the *caesars*. Having reached their destination, Manuel and Helene once again seated themselves on two thrones that were standing ready on a podium covered in red cloth and surrounded by curtains. At a sign from the choirmaster, the curtains opened, and the emperor and empress were revealed to the gathered crowds, who once again voiced their acclamation. After the curtains had closed, the newlyweds entered the Great Palace, changed their robes (keeping their crowns), and feasted together while the officials of the court, senators, and noblemen waited on them.[1379]

When the feast ended, these distinguished servants bowed (or kneeled) in front of their sovereigns and took their leave. In the meantime, the *protovestiarios* (the head of the private treasury of the emperor[1380]) climbed onto an elevated platform and threw *epikombia* to the people. These cloth sachets usually contained

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1374 See the argumentation of Reinert (Reinert (2001), 300).

1375 *Verpeaux, Ps.-Kodinos*, 358. For a detailed analysis of these texts, the reasons behind their selection, and their connection with the Byzantine Empire in 1392, see Reinert (2001), especially 295–301.

1376 *Majeska, Travellers*, 111. Majeska further noted that Helene did not receive communion in the south wing of the sanctuary but "at the chancel barrier which opened on the *metatorion*, the imperial oratory in the southeast corner of the church." *Majeska, Travellers*, 432.

1377 *Pseudo-Kodinos* prescribes that the emperor and empress make an appearance from the gallery of the catechumens, where they were to sit on thrones placed on an elevated platform covered by gold curtains. These curtains were opened, and the imperial family received the acclamation of the people (*Pseudo-Kodinos*, 234, for explanation, see *ibid.*, 235, fn. 683). Based on the account of Ignatios, it seems that the imperial couple may have skipped this ritual, which took place later by the Great Palace.

1378 *Majeska, Travellers*, 113.

1379 For further details on the reception, see *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 236 (VII).

1380 For details, see *ODB* III, 1749.

three gold coins, three silver coins, and three copper coins, but given the difficult financial situation of the empire, they may have held coins of lesser value on this particular occasion.[1381] The display of imperial generosity concluded the official coronation festivities. In the days that followed, various public celebrations and official receptions were held, including one organized by the empress and her husband for the court dignitaries in the palace.[1382]

Mother of a large family

Unfortunately, the first years of Manuel and Helene's marriage were full of turmoil. In 1393, Sultan Bayezid I summoned the emperor and several of his relatives to his court and threatened them with death. He mutilated some of their servants in the hope of making the Byzantines more submissive to his plans for expansion. Manuel eventually contrived an escape and subsequently broke off relations with the Ottoman ruler. Aware that the sultan would be quick to retaliate, Manuel proceeded to strengthen the defenses of Constantinople. The following year, Bayezid and his army laid siege to the Byzantine capital.[1383]

Despite all Manuel's worries regarding matrimony (as set forth in the *Dialogue with the Empress-Mother on Marriage)*,[1384] his union with Helene Dragaš proved both amicable and advantageous. The empress gave birth to as many as ten children in succession. Six sons survived infancy: John (VIII) (*1392), Theodore (*1394), Andronikos (*1400), Constantine (*1405), Demetrios (*1407/8), and Thomas (*1410).[1385] Apparently, four children died prematurely: Constantine, Michael (died of the plague in 1409–1410),[1386] and two daughters (died before September 1405).[1387] Helene must have had a strong constitution, for by the time her youngest son was born, she was close to her fortieth year. There has been some debate regarding the emperor's illegitimate children. Scholars nevertheless agree that

1381 See the comment in *Majeska, Travellers*, 435. See also *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 214, 216 (VII). According to *Pseudo-Kodinos*, the *epikombia* were thrown to the people at the beginning of the coronation day before the emperor who was to be crowned was raised on the shield.

1382 *Verpeaux, Ps.-Kodinos*, 357–361.

1383 Anastasijević places Manuel's stay in Serres prior to the wedding of Manuel and Helene. For details, see Anastasijević (1939), 28 ff.

1384 For interesting observations on Manuel's composition and revision of this work, see Barker (1969), 426 ff.

1385 *Sphrantzes*, 6 f. (III,1). See *Doukas* 175 (XXIII, 6). *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 183. See also *Cod. Vatop.* 1201, f. 9v. For a detailed study of the chronology of Manuel and Helene's family, see Schreiner (1970), 285. Barker (1969), 494 ff. Also read Djurić (1996), 53–55. Gill (1957), 152.

1386 *PLP*, n. 21520.

1387 *Sphrantzes* 6 f. (III,1). Papadopoulos (1938), 55.

these children, if they actually existed,[1388] were all born in the course of Manuel's long bachelorhood.[1389]

Manuel and Helene's sons apparently did not inherit their father's abilities as a statesman.[1390] Due to his age, numerous political obligations, and perhaps his scholarly interests as well, the emperor did not devote much time to the upbringing of his children (though he penned advice to his heir[1391] in a vain attempt to influence the latter's political decisions). Parental responsibilities thus rested squarely on the shoulders of the empress (and a crowd of tutors, presumably).

A portrait of the imperial family, which was completed before Manuel left for the West in 1400, offers rare information on the appearance of the imperial couple and three of their children. The emperor's image has been much acclaimed by art historians and is considered "one of the most beautiful in Byzantine portraiture."[1392] Manuel was of short stature with blond hair, an aquiline nose, and blue eyes. His features strongly resembled those of his grandfather, John VI Kantakouzenos.[1393] Unfortunately, the image of Helene's face is damaged. She is depicted as a relatively tall woman with dark hair and eyes, traits which her two younger sons apparently inherited.[1394] An anonymous Byzantine short chronicle describes her as one-eyed,[1395] but no other source confirms or explains such a deformity. In the

1388 In his article, Thierry Ganchou claims that Manuel did not have any illegitimate children but that the children considered to be his were, in fact, the illegitimate children of his father and brother. For details, see Ganchou (2014), 136, 154 (for explanation).

1389 Barker (1969), 402, 474–478. Of these children, only a girl named Isabella (Zampia), the wife of a Genoese lord named Ilario Doria, is known by name.

1390 Barker (Barker (1969), 402) judges the imperial children quite severely: "His six sons were a mixed brood. None of them was particularly gifted, and they varied in quality from the gallant Constantine to the worthless Demetrius. One, Andronicus, was prematurely wasted and destroyed by disease before he could prove himself, while another, Theodore, was quickly revealed as incapable of consistent and responsible leadership in the Morea. The two youngest, Demetrios and Thomas, displayed capacities for little other than selfish ambition in their disgraceful rivalry in the Morea during the Empire's closing hours, undoing much of their family's previous good work."

1391 *Praecepta educationis regiae ad filium Joanem caira centum* and *Orationes ethicopoliticae*. For details, see Barker (1969), 434 f., fn. 67.

1392 Spatharakis (1976), 141. For further details on the manuscript, see *ibid.*, 139–144. See also Lowden (1992), 251 ff. On the role of the manuscript that contains the portrait, see Hilsdale (2014), 236–248.

1393 Compare *Parisinus gr.* 1242, f. 5v. with MS. Ivoires 100, f. 2r. Musée du Louvre.

1394 Spatharakis (1976), ill. 93. See also Barker (1969), 263 f. See also Garland (1989), 93.

1395 "οὗτος (Manuel II) μετὰ τῆς γυναικὸς τῆς κυρᾶς Ἑλένης τῆς Σέρβας, τῆς μονοφθάλμου, τῆς φύσει φρονίμου, γεννᾷ υἱοὺς ς´· Ἰωάννην, Θεόδωρον, Κωνσταντῖνον τὸν Δράγασιν, Δημήτριον, Θωμᾶν καὶ Ἀνδρονίκον τὸν λωβόν." *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken*, I, 183. See also Barker (1969), 100, fn. 24.



Ill. 11: *Portrait of Manuel II Palaiologos, Empress Helene, and their sons John, Theodore, and Andronikos in the works of Dionysios the Areopagite. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Ivoires, (MR 416), cod. A 53, fol. 2r. (Photo: Daniel Arnaudet)*

miniature, Helene wears a red robe decorated with a golden pattern and a high crown richly embellished with precious stones; she holds a long scepter studded with pearls (Ill. 11).

Death of her father and mother-in-law

In the second part of the fourteenth century, the Balkan rulers (including Helene's father) gradually became vassals of the sultan and had to participate in Ottoman

military campaigns. On one such expedition, Constantine Dragaš was killed while fighting the Wallachians in the Battle of Rovine on May 17, 1395.[1396] After his death, the Turks took over the government of the Serbian territory he had ruled.[1397] Helene mourned the death of her father, whose name she bestowed on two of her sons. In October of the same year, to honor his memory, the emperor and empress made a donation of 500 *hyperpyra* to the monks of the Prodromos in Petra Monastery[1398] in Constantinople, an institution apparently known for its contacts with Serbia,[1399] in exchange for three weekly services and an annual celebration of the anniversary of Constantine's death.[1400] At some point in her life, Helene also donated a reliquary cross to the St. John Prodromos Church of the Dionysiou Monastery on Athos. The silver inscription describes her as "*despoina* the wife of Manuel II Palaiologos and daughter of Constantine Dragaš, the lord of Serbia."[1401] The fact that both donations were made to institutions with the same patron saint suggest that the empress was devoted to John the Baptist.

The following year, Manuel lost his beloved mother, Empress Helene Palaiologina.[1402] Little is known about the dowager empress's relationship with her daughter-in-law, but as the elder Helene had earnestly wished for her favorite son to marry,[1403] it is safe to assume that she was favorably disposed towards his wife. She probably taught her successor the ceremonial of the Byzantine court and helped her to adjust to a new court environment. Years later, Helene Dragaš honored her mother-in-law by selecting the same monastic name, Hypomone (Patience), on taking the veil.

The long wait in the Peloponnese

As the political situation of the empire gradually deteriorated, the events of the 1390s seemed to herald its doom. Military ventures by Western armies had not proved effective against the Turks; still, the crusade of King Sigismund of Hungary must have given the Byzantines hope. After his defeat at Nicopolis in 1396, Sigismund came to Constantinople, promised to return with another army, and

1396 Barker (1969), 117, 127 f. Marjanović-Dušanić (2014), 120. Šesták–Tejchman–Havlíková *et al.* (1998), 73.

1397 Pelikán–Havlíková–Chrobák *et al.* (2004), 100.

1398 According to Janin, the monastery enjoyed the special favor of the late Palaiologan emperors. For details, see Janin (1953), 438. See also Babić (1987), 62.

1399 Marjanović-Dušanić (2014), 123.

1400 *MM* II, 260–264. *Darrouzes*, *Regestes* VI, 280, n. 3014. *Dölger*, *Regesten*, n. 3257, 83. For details on the monastery, see Malamut (2001), 227. Janin (1953), 435–443. See also Barker (1969), xxv. Radojčić (1928). Radojčić (1927). Anastasijević (1939), 32.

1401 For details, see Ostrogorsky (1970), 274. Babić (1987), 62. Talbot (2011–2012), 269, for image, see ill. 5.

1402 Barker (1969), 146, Appendix IX.

1403 See *Manuel, Dialogue* for details.

sailed west. The young empress may have entertained the king during his stay in the Byzantine capital.[1404]

By 1399, the imperial couple and their family had been besieged by the Turks in Constantinople for five years, and morale in the city was waning. The French king, Charles VI, sent a small contingent to Byzantium under Jean II Le Maingre (also known as Marshall Boucicaut) in an attempt to alleviate their distress. A good strategist, Boucicaut soon realized that the Byzantine position was untenable without strong military intervention and advised Manuel to seek the military support of European rulers.[1405]

The emperor decided that the proposal had merit and made peace with his nephew, John VII, who was to assume the government of Constantinople in Manuel's absence.[1406] Uncle and nephew apparently solved the question of succession using adoption: Manuel adopted John VII, who then adopted Manuel's son, the future John VIII.[1407] Despite their official reconciliation, Manuel apparently did not truly trust John and preferred to place his family under the protection of his brother Theodore in the Peloponnese.[1408] Making further provision for their safety, Manuel approached the Venetian Republic, which agreed that in the event of a Turkish invasion of the peninsula, the imperial family and the emperor's brother would be able to take refuge in the Venetian bases of Modon and Coron and, if necessary, sail to safety in Venice.[1409] On December 10, 1399, the emperor and his family left Constantinople for the Despotate of the Morea,[1410] which became home to Helene and her children for the next two and a half years.[1411] Helene bid her husband farewell, and the following year, she gave birth to their third son, Andronikos. The separation from her husband must have been one of the loneliest times of the empress's life. It was also a time of great sorrow, for it was in the Peloponnese that her (first) son Constantine died.

Although Manuel failed to acquire the desired military support, the life of the empire was unexpectedly prolonged by the arrival of the Mongol armies of Timur Lenk (known in the West as Tamerlane), who challenged the Ottomans and destroyed Bayezid's troops at Ankara in July 1402. The sultan was taken captive

1404 On Sigismund's stay in Constantinople, see Barker (1969), 484 f.

1405 For details, sources, and literature, see Barker (1969), 490–493. Nicol (1972B), 322. Andreeva (1934). On the embassies sent out by Manuel and on his policies, see Malamut (2002).

1406 *Doukas*, 85 (XIV,5). Barker (1969), 162–165.

1407 Leonte (2009), 171. Nicol (1972B), 320 ff.

1408 Barker (1969), 170. Gill (1957), 152. Nicol (1972B), 322.

1409 *Thiriet, Régestes* II, n. 978, 10. *Dölger, Regesten* V, 3279, 86. Barker (1969), 170 f. Vasiliev (1912), 58 f.

1410 *Doukas*, 85 (XIV,5). The Morea was the medieval name for the Peloponnese.

1411 For details on the ages of the imperial sons in the course of their stay in the Morea, see Barker (1969), 494–496.

and later committed suicide in prison.[1412] News of the reprieve reached Manuel in Paris,[1413] and he immediately began to make preparations for his homeward journey. In April 1403, the emperor landed in Modon, where Helene and her sons were waiting to welcome him.[1414] The sources do not explain when or how the empress returned to the Byzantine capital, but it is probable that she was with her husband when he entered the city on June 9 of the same year.[1415]

The sources rarely mention Helene in the next decade of her life; therefore, her concerns and occupations must be deduced from what the chronicles say about her family. Four years after their return from the Peloponnese, the imperial family was separated once again when the empress's second son, Theodore, who was only ten years old at the time, was sent back to the peninsula to learn the secrets of government from his ailing uncle (also Theodore) and gradually assume the administration of the despotate.[1416] Helene's third son, Andronikos, left his mother soon after Theodore. When John VII died childless in Thessalonike in 1408, Manuel immediately left the Peloponnese for Thessaly to secure the city. He summoned the eight-year-old Andronikos and established him as ruler and despot of Thessalonike.

It seems that Helene did not follow her husband on his journeys but remained in the capital, possibly governing in her husband's absence. Her presence in Constantinople in 1408 is probable as it was the year Helene gave birth to her son Demetrios. The following year she buried her son Michael after he succumbed to the plague, and a year later, she was safely delivered of her last child, Thomas. Considering that Helene's eldest and youngest children were born sixteen years apart and that her husband was often either absent or occupied with affairs of state, caring for and coordinating the large imperial household must have taken all of Helene's time and energy. In 1414, she welcomed another new member into her family in the form of the eleven-year-old Princess Anna, the daughter of the Moscow tsar and the bride of Helene's son John. As her mother-in-law had doubtless done for her, the empress began preparing her daughter-in-law for her imperial duties and helped her adjust to life in Byzantium. Sadly, Anna died of the plague three years later, and it was probably Helene who organized her burial in the Convent of Lips in 1417.

Final years of marriage

In the 1420s, Manuel concluded an agreement with the pope, which stipulated that his two eldest sons would marry Latin princesses. A year later, Helene

1412 *Doukas*, 91–101 (XVI).
1413 Nicol (1972B), 326 f.
1414 *Doukas*, 85 (XIV,5). Nicol (1972B), 334.
1415 On Manuel's return, see *Doukas*, 111 (XVIII,1). For the dating, see Barker (1969), 237, fn. 69. On the last decades of Manuel's carreer, see Nicol (1972B), 334–356.
1416 *Chalkokondyles* I, 202. Barker (1969), 273.

probably prepared for and attended the wedding and coronation of her son John and his new Italian bride, Sophia of Montferrat. In the same year, there was another outbreak of the plague in Constantinople, and the emperor temporarily entered the Monastery of the Peribleptos in order to avoid the epidemic. The sources do not mention whether the empress accompanied him or took refuge in one of the city's convents. Though neither of them contracted the plague, the emperor could not forever escape the consequences of a strenuous life. On October 1, 1422, he was paralyzed by a stroke.[1417] In the remaining three years of his life, Manuel gradually recovered command of his mental faculties and resumed control over affairs of state although he remained bedridden.[1418] Besides caring for her husband, the empress became increasingly involved in political affairs, supporting her son John as he slowly assumed his father's responsibilities. She must have been concerned for her other sons as well. In January 1423, unhappy that his father had entrusted him with Lemnos and not with the Morea, Demetrios fled to Galata in order to ally himself with the Ottomans.[1419] Ultimately, he did not follow through with his plan and instead took refuge at the court of the Hungarian king, Sigismund.

Helene's son Andronikos, who had become governor of Thessalonike in 1408, was a sickly young man, and towards the end of his life he contracted leprosy. At the age of twenty-three, he transferred Thessalonike to the Venetians[1420] and became a monk on the Holy Mountain of Athos, where he died in 1429. His body was then carried to Constantinople, and his mother buried him in the imperial mausoleum in the Pantokrator.

As Manuel's strength failed, Helene gave more support to her son John, no easy task for a woman who was known for her devotion to Orthodoxy. The young emperor visited Pope Eugene IV in Rome in 1424 and agreed to seek a union with the Roman church and the Hungarian king in order to secure military aid against the Turks. In John's absence, the empress took charge of the capital and became involved in the peace negotiations with Murad II (February 1424), to whom she sent the young diplomat George Sphrantzes.[1421]

1417 Barker (1969), 367, fn. 119, 381 f.
1418 Barker (1969), 382.
1419 On Demetrios's plotting, see *Sphrantzes*, 90 (XXV,3).
1420 Barker (1969), 372.
1421 *Sphrantzes*, 26 (XII,4). According to the peace agreement, Byzantium lost the cities on the Black Sea coast (with the exception of Mesembria and Derkos and several others) but kept Zetunion and other towns on the Strymon. The emperor was also obliged to pay the sultan 300,000 *aspra*. For further details, see *Dölger, Regesten* V, 112, n. 3414. Marjanović-Dušanić (2014), 124. Malamut (2015), 86. Malamut (2002), 444.

The dowager empress

Manuel II died on July 21, 1425, under the monastic name of Matthew (Mathaios).[1422] His widow buried him with all due ceremony in the imperial mausoleum in the Pantokrator.[1423] Around this time, the empress became a nun, accepting the name Hypomone (Patience) on taking the veil. A poem by Cardinal Bessarion celebrates the two "sets of clothing" worn by the emperor and empress, the imperial and the monastic, praising the virtues of each along with those who wore them. The section dedicated to the monastic robe mentions the newness of the garb for both wearers, suggesting that the imperial couple took their vows at the same time or shortly after one another.[1424]

In her later years, Helene remained actively involved not only in the lives of her children[1425] but also in the political life of the empire. The Duke of Milan, writing to the Byzantine emperor regarding an anti-Venetian alliance, addressed separate letters to both John and Helene.[1426] Helene was also instrumental in persuading John VIII to allow George Sphrantzes to accompany Constantine to the Morea.[1427]

The empress originally refused to support the pro-Catholic policy of John VIII, who temporarily abandoned the efforts he had initiated in 1424. Under pressure from the Ottoman Empire, he decided to reopen negotiations in the spring of 1431 and requested his mother's assistance.[1428] In 1435, Helene Dragaš received a letter from the organizers of the council in Ferrara. It was delivered by Jan Stojković, who was specifically charged with negotiating with the empress as well.[1429] Having been persuaded to support the Union (and perhaps having remembered that her husband had once considered a union a prudent solution[1430]), the empress summoned a council (known as the Palatiane), which was held in her palace apartments. It brought together the anti-Unionists, who agreed to participate in a new council. The emperor, his brother Demetrios, the patriarch, and a large delegation of clergy and dignitaries then sailed to Italy in 1437 to join the Council of Ferrara-Florence.[1431]

1422 *Doukas*, 237 (XXVIII,7). Barker (1969), 383.
1423 For details, see also Barker (1969), 550, no. 8.
1424 *LPP* III, 281–283.
1425 See, for example, *Sphrantzes*, 36 (XV,8); the bull of Thomas Palaiologos (*LPP* IV, 239 f.). See also the study of Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić, who stresses Helene's influence on the lives of her offspring (Marjanović-Dušanić (2014), 122 ff.).
1426 *Luigi Osio* II, 405, III, 49 f. For details, see Marjanović-Dušanić (2014), 123.
1427 *Sphrantzes*, 34 f. (XV,8). For the reign of John VIII, see Durić (1984).
1428 *Syropoulos*, 118–122 (II,16–19).
1429 Leszka–Leszka (2017), 380.
1430 *Manuel, Funeral Oration*, 244 f, n. 161. Marjanović-Dušanić (2014), 127.
1431 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 187, n. 43. On the council, see, for example, Geanakoplos (1989A).

Busy overseeing the strengthening of the city's walls and defenses, Helene was also involved in governing the capital in the absence of the emperor,[1432]who frequently revealed his dependence on his mother's judgment.[1433] Sylvester Syropoulos describes how, after the death of Patriarch Joseph II in Florence in 1439, John VIII insisted on consulting his mother regarding Joseph's successor.[1434] Her influence also allowed Helene to protect those who rejected a union with the Catholic Church (1439), and John's tolerant policy towards the anti-Unionists seems to bear her imprint.[1435]

On their return from Italy, both John VIII and Demetrios learned that their wives had died. John decided to remain single, perhaps because he had already been married twice (his marriage to Sophia of Montferrat had been annulled) and a third marriage was strictly forbidden by the Orthodox Church. It is also possible that he wished to remain faithful to the memory of his beautiful wife, Maria of Trebizond, of whom he had reportedly been very fond. Demetrios, the *enfant terrible* of the family, decided to take a new wife. He chose the daughter of a certain Asen[1436] who was living in Byzantium, and they were married in Mesembria soon afterwards. A short chronicle claims that Demetrios's choice caused an uproar in the family and that the marriage took place "against the will of his mother and the emperor."[1437]

In 1448, Helene witnessed the abortive attempt of the Hungarian regent, János Hunyady, to stem the Turkish progress in the Second Battle of Kosovo.[1438] In the same year, she buried two of her sons in the Pantokrator Monastery: Theodore, who died of the plague in Selymbria in June, and John (VIII), who died in Constantinople on October 31.[1439] Helene then faced the difficult task of mediating among her remaining sons regarding John's successor. The empress helped persuade Demetrios to share the government of the Morea with his brother Thomas and negotiated the inauguration of her fourth son, Constantine, as emperor.[1440]

1432 *Syropoulos*, 396 (VIII,7), see also fn. 2.
1433 Gill (1957), 155.
1434 *Syropoulos*, 511 (X,24).
1435 Marjanović-Dušanić (2014), 125. Leszka–Leszka (2017), 381.
1436 A member of the family of the Bulgarian tsar.
1437 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 187, n. 44.
1438 Pelikán–Havlíková–Chrobák *et al.* (2004), 113.
1439 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 187, n. 46.
1440 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 187, ns. 45–46. *Sphrantzes*, 100 (XXIX, 3), 102 (XXIX,7). In his work on the final centuries of Byzantium, Nicol (Nicol (1972B), 390) writes that Helene "lived as widow and a nun until March 1450; and it was her firmness that ultimately assured that Constantine should wear the crown. For early in November 1448 his [John VIII's] brother Demetrios had already hurried to the capital from Selymbria to claim the succession; and his other brother Thomas was on his way there from the Morea. Demetrios was, or presented himself to be, the champion of the anti-Unionist party. He was accepted as such by George

After Constantine's ascent to power,[1441] Helene took an unexpected step when she persuaded him to have the name of his late brother John withdrawn from the commemorations.[1442] It is difficult to judge whether she was motivated by piety, personal remorse, or a desire to protect the interests of the dynasty by dissociating Constantine from his pro-Latin, Unionist predecessor (as Theodora Palaiologina had done after the death of her husband Michael VIII).[1443] Soon afterwards, however, both she and Constantine realized that John's policy had been necessary. Any help that could come to the empire – unless another army was to descend from the Far East and successfully challenge the Ottomans – had to come from the West. Not all of their subjects arrived at the same conclusion, however. Dino Geanakoplos fittingly noted that "it was the view of the majority of the Orthodox that the danger of Latinization threatened not only their religion but their political, social, and economic life as well."[1444]

Helene in the memory of her subjects

The empress died on March 23, 1450, after 25 years of widowhood and was buried next to her husband in the Pantokrator Monastery.[1445] The fact that the date of her death is preserved by several different sources testifies to Helene's popularity among her subjects. Although her name was not added to the list of pious empresses in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* (apparently because of the long shadow cast by the new Union),[1446] her demise is commemorated in three monodies by leading contemporary intellectuals: the scholar John Eugenikos,[1447] the philosopher George Gemisthos Plethon,[1448] and the scholar (and later patriarch) George Scholarios.[1449] As is typical for this genre, the speeches reveal little about Helene's life. John Eugenikos praises the empress as a pious and virtuous woman, who was misguided in the matter of a union with the Catholic Church by her evil

Scholarios, and he assumed the charge of the city's defense. But the mother of them all, the Empress Helena, overruled him and asserted her right to act as regent until the eldest of her surviving sons arrived from Greece. In December [1448] she sent George Sphrantzes to the Sultan Murad to ask that he would recognize Constantine as the new Emperor." See also Nicol (1972B), 390.

1441 On the reign of Constantine XI, see Nicol (1992). Nicol (1972B), 390–417.

1442 Marjanović-Dušanić (2014), 126. Anastasijević (1939), 37.

1443 *Petrides, Chrysobulle*, 25–28.

1444 Geanakoplos (1989A), 247.

1445 *Mioni, Cronaca inedita*, for texts, see 77, n. 52, (trans. and notes), 85. *Sphrantzes*, 104 (XXX,3). *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 188, n. 48.

1446 For further details, see Part Two, Chapter 5, Seasons of Life.

1447 *PLP*, n. 6189.

1448 *PLP*, n. 3630. For the monody, see *LPP* III, 266–280. See also Sideras (1982), 326–329, for manuscripts, editions, and translations, see *ibid.*, 327 ff.

1449 *PLP*, n. 27304.

advisors.[1450] Gemisthos Plethon presents Helene as a woman descended from the ancient nation of Thrace,[1451] a virtuous lady able to accept misfortune and happier times with equal grace, a woman who, like another Penelope, had distinguished herself by her wit, her nobility, her discretion, and the beauty of her soul.[1452] Finally, Gennadios Scholarios[1453] lists the virtues of the late empress and remarks that, like a fusion of the best parts of Mary and Martha, she attended to the spiritual but did not neglect the practical side of life. Among her virtues, he noted her great wisdom, asceticism, piety, courage, generosity, mercy, and humility, praising above all the fact that, although she was of foreign origin, Helene had bound her fate with that of the Greek people.[1454]

Whose seal and charity?

The lead seal collection of the Russian Archeological Institute in Constantinople contains the seal of a Helene Palaiologina, bearing the inscription "Ἑλέν(η) ἐν Χ(ριστ)ῷ τῷ [Θ](ε)ῷ πι(σ)τὴ αὐ[γ]ούστ[α] καὶ [αὐ]τ[ο]κρατόρ(ισ)σα Ῥωμαίω[ν] ἡ Παλ(αι)ολ[ο]γ[ίνη]."[1455] On the obverse, there is a rough image of the Theotokos seated on a throne, holding Christ on her lap. The empress herself is depicted on the reverse, holding a scepter with three branches. She is wearing a crown with *propendylia*,[1456] a purple, wide-sleeved *divitision* decorated with gold embroidery, and a *loros* decorated with precious stones.

In his study of the seal, Pančenko argues that this Helene must have been the wife of Manuel II because the wife of John V never adopted the name Palaiologina. Actually, this was not the case. Helene Kantakouzene did adopt the name of her husband, forsaking that of her father. Another of Pančenko's arguments, the similarity of the empress on the seal to the image of Helene the wife of Manuel, preserved in the manuscript of Dionysios the Areopagite, donated by the same emperor to the Monastery of St. Denis in 1408, likewise fails to settle the question decisively. Pančenko writes that the depiction of the empress on the coin corresponds with the manuscript image[1457] as does the inscription. However, as the images and inscriptions on the seals of both Palaiologan empresses follow an established pattern, his argument does not prove that the seal belonged to the wife of Manuel rather than to her formidable mother-in-law.

1450 *LPP* I, 56–61, see especially 58 f.
1451 *LPP* III, 267.
1452 *LPP* III, 272 f. For a German translation, see *Blum, Plethon*, 105–111.
1453 *Scholarios* I, 262–270. For a Serbian translation, see Anastasijević (1939), 40–48.
1454 *Scholarios* I, 264 f.
1455 Pančenko (1908), 106 f.
1456 Ornaments, pearls, or precious stones suspended on a thin chain from the crown.
1457 For details, see Spatharakis (1976), 140, for a copy of the image, see *ibid.*, ill. 93.

As for other objects connected with Helene Dragaš, there has been some debate regarding the possibility that she sponsored the bilateral (two-part) icon of the Poganovo Monastery in southeastern Serbia.[1458] Due to the damaged inscription, the name of the donor cannot be reliably identified. Even if Helene was not the donor of this particular icon, her beneficence towards monastic houses is evidenced by the aforementioned donations to monasteries as well as the fact that she petitioned her husband to grant land on the island of Lemnos to the Panteleimon Monastery, traditionally supported by her (Serbian) ancestors and relatives.[1459]

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Helene Dragaš was the last empress to sit on the Byzantine throne, having outlived her three imperial daughters-in-law and having experienced fifty-eight years of the history of the empire. Though not often mentioned in the sources, she appears to have been a woman of remarkable stamina and political influence, able to win the love and respect of her much older husband as well as that of her subjects. She also managed to prevent internal conflicts and provide guidance during the insecure times that followed the deaths of her husband and her son John.

Greek authors as well as modern historiographers have remarked on the fact that the first and last Byzantine emperors were named 'Constantine' while their mothers were both called 'Helene.'[1460] Gennadios Scholarios spoke of Manuel's wife as the 'last' Helene, who died "shortly before the fall of the City."[1461] Besides piety, she had little in common with her saintly predecessor. She was a foreigner of noble origin and the mother of a crowd of children. She did not travel extensively, did not build any monastic institutions, and did not achieve sainthood. Nevertheless, she died at nearly eighty years of age as the last *augousta* of the Byzantine Empire, closing the line of the great empresses who were actively involved in the political and religious life of their empire.

1458 For a detailed overview of the debate with all relevant bibliography, see Pentcheva (2000), 139 f., fn. 1. This hypothesis was rejected by Gordana Babić, who argued that Helene Dragaš did not show special devotion to John the Evangelist but to the Prodromos. Also, the donor Helene is identified as the *basilissa*, a title which was not used for empresses but only for wives of despots and princes in the late Byzantine period. The author concludes that the donor was Helene the wife of Despot Uglješa of Serres. For details, see Babić (1987), 61 f.

1459 *Actes de Panteleimon*, 120, 123.

1460 Lambros (1908), 284, 262. *Kritoboulos*, 80. *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 370, n. 4. *Tomadakes, Chronografia*, 33. *Bandini* II, 676.

1461 *Scholarios* IV, 510.

XII Eirene Gattilusio: The Widowed Empress (1397–1440)

Introduction

In 1355, Maria Palaiologina,[1462] the daughter of Andronikos III and the sister of John V, married Francesco I Gattilusio and brought her husband the island of Lesbos as her dowry. Francesco was a Genoese nobleman and adventurer, who had acquired great respect as a ruler and diplomat in the courts of the East. When an earthquake destroyed his palace on Lesbos in 1383/1384, Francesco and his two elder sons died in the ruins. Jacob, his youngest son, miraculously survived. He assumed the name of his father and, as Francesco II Gattilusio, became a formidable warrior as well as an astute politician, who cultivated good relations with the sultan, the Byzantine imperial court, and various Western rulers.[1463]

The name of Francesco's wife is unknown, but according to William Miller, she was "a noble dame of gentle breeding and European accomplishments, acquired at the court of Marie de Bourbon, titular Empress of Constantinople and Princess of Achaia, in whose society she had been educated."[1464] According to Polymnia Katsoni, the couple had at least five children: Jacob, Dorino, Palamedes, Eugenia, and Helene.[1465] Born around 1384,[1466] Eugenia (Eirene),[1467] the great-niece of Emperor John V, was destined to become the bride of the Byzantine emperor John VII Palaiologos.[1468]

'Eugenia' or 'Eirene'?

There has been some debate regarding the name of this empress as both 'Eugenia' and 'Eirene' appear in the sources. John VII mentioned his wife by the name 'Eirene' in donations made to six different monasteries (including the Lavra)[1469] and in a donation made to the Esphigmenou Monastery on Mount Athos in 1404.[1470] In

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1462 For further details on this woman, see Miller (1913), 411 f.

1463 For a thorough study of the Gattilusio lordship in the Aegean world, see the study of Wright (2014). See also Miller (1913), 412–417. For further literature, see also Barker (1969), 493.

1464 Miller (1913), 414.

1465 Katsoni (1991), 187.

1466 See Mešanović (1996), 72.

1467 *PLP*, n. 21358.

1468 Dölger (1931). Miller (1913), 415. Dabrowska (1996), 40. For the reign of John VII, see Mešanović (1996). Gill (1985), 50.

1469 *Actes de Lavra* III, 148.

1470 *Lampros, Catalogue* I, 181, n. 2104.

the dating formulas of these documents, the empress appears along with her husband as "our most pious emperors, John and Eirene the Palaiologans." There is also evidence that 'Eugenia' was the empress's monastic name and was adopted around the time of her husband's death, according to the usual practice of the Palaiologan empresses.[1471] When Sphrantzes and Syropoulos called the empress 'Eugenia' at the time of her death,[1472] they very correctly used the religious name by which she was known for the greater part of her life.

But while the daughter of Francesco II Gattilusio was known to her subjects as Empress Eirene, it seems improbable that 'Eirene' was her birth name. Despite a close connection with the Byzantine emperors, this noble Genoese family maintained the Catholic confession, and the fact that the mother of the future empress had grown up in a strictly Catholic, Western court suggests that her children received a Catholic upbringing. The Greek name 'Eirene' was not common in the Latin world; however, it was often chosen by foreign princesses when they married a Byzantine heir apparent (e.g., Bertha-Eirene of Sulzbach, who was the wife of Manuel I, Eirene-Yolanda of Montferrat, or Eirene-Adelheid of Braunschweig-Grubenhagen). This suggests that Gattilusio's daughter also received the name 'Eirene' on her conversion to Orthodoxy. The theory put forth by Polymnia Katsoni – that the princess received the name 'Eugenia' at baptism, accepted 'Eirene' after her conversion to Orthodoxy, and reverted to 'Eugenia' on becoming a nun[1473] – fits all the known facts.

Marriage to John VII

Very little is known about Eirene's childhood. She may have been educated in the West like her mother, or she may have grown up with her siblings at her father's court on Lesbos. Like so many other medieval princesses, her historical life begins with her wedding to the Byzantine emperor. The marriage must have taken place sometime before July 1397[1474] when Francesco is first referred to as John VII's father-in-law.[1475] Eirene was a young bride; if she married as late as 1397, she

1471 Papadopoulos (1938), 53 f. The following scholars believed that the empress's baptismal name was 'Eugenia': Barker (1969), 462. Miller (1913), 414. Dennis (1965), 134, fn. 34. Papadopoulos, (1938), 53. For the reference to Dölger, see Dölger (1931), 29, fn. 5. For Oikonomides, see Oikonomides (1968), 28 f., fn. 15.

1472 *Sphrantzes*, 86 (XXIV,3). *Syropoulos*, 542 (IX,20), see also fn. 3.

1473 For full argumentation, see Katsoni (1991), especially 189 f.

1474 The problem of dating the marriage was discussed by Katsoni (1991), 181–201. Barker (Barker (1969), 462–466). Dennis dated the wedding more broadly to 1390–1397 (Dennis (1967), 179). Mešanović proposes April 1390 as the most probable date (Mešanović (1996), 73).

1475 Lambros (1913), 249. In fact, he is described as the father of John ("reverendissimus et carissimus pater imperii nostri").

would have been no more than thirteen years old.[1476] The sources do not mention where the wedding took place, but both Selymbria, the residence of the groom, and Lesbos are possible locations. In the course of the ceremony, having already been crowned by his father in 1377,[1477] John himself probably placed the diadem on the head of his wife.[1478] While Eirene's coronation is not mentioned by the sources, the fact that John described his wife as *augousta* in his privilege for the Lavra Monastery makes a strong case for the event's having occurred.[1479] For John, the marriage may not have been merely a matter of political convenience but was perhaps of deep personal importance as well. John VII had been competing with his uncle for the Byzantine throne since the death of his grandfather in 1391. Francesco II was a powerful personality, and the fact that his family was originally from Genoa made him a suitable ally for John, just as he had been for John's father, Andronikos IV. For these reasons, Francesco may have become something of a father figure to John, who had lost his own father at the age of fifteen. Because of his youth, he lacked the political experience of his uncle and was most likely in need of a mentor.

Empress of Constantinople

In August 1399, Charles VI of France sent a contingent of knights under the command of Jean II Le Maingre, also known as Marshall Boucicaut, to Constantinople, which was under siege by the Ottoman Turks. Boucicaut proved to be an excellent diplomat. Soon after his arrival, he set out for Selymbria, brought John to the Byzantine capital, and effected an agreement between the young emperor and his uncle. John was to govern Constantinople during Manuel's sojourn in Western Europe and would become the governor of Thessalonike on his return.

The sources offer no information on Eirene's whereabouts after her wedding. She may have remained with her father on Lesbos although it is more likely that she followed her husband to Selymbria. On December 4, 1399, she accompanied John, her mother-in-law (Maria of Bulgaria), and her husband's supporters to the Byzantine capital.[1480] In the absence of Helene Dragaš, who was with her children in the Peloponnese, Eirene assumed her position at the court and, under the guidance of her experienced mother-in-law, doubtless learned the details of the

1476 *Dennis, Short Chronicle*, 136.
1477 *Chalkokondyles* II, 57.
1478 Palaiologan emperors who married after their own coronation ceremony usually crowned their wives following the wedding ceremony.
1479 *Actes de Lavra* III, 148.
1480 *MM* II, 360. It is not completely clear from the text whether he came with his mother and his supporters or whether his wife was with them as well. However, it is probable that Eirene accompanied her husband on this occasion even though her presence is not directly attested to by the sources.

court ceremonial.[1481] Around this time she also gave birth to her only known child, Andronikos.[1482]

The imperial couple ruled Constantinople through the difficult final years of the Turkish siege, which had begun in 1394 and had reduced many of the city's inhabitants to poverty. Despite rumors, which proved unfounded, that John had agreed to give Constantinople to Sultan Bayezid,[1483] the young emperor managed to protect the city for over two years until Manuel's return in June 1403. During John's rule, the Mongols (led by Timur Lenk, also known as Tamerlane) attacked the Ottoman Empire. The sultan was forced to abandon the siege of Constantinople and quickly transport his troops to Asia Minor, where they were routed in the Battle of Ankara (1402) shortly afterward. Sultan Bayezid I was captured and died in prison. John VII used his enemy's unexpected downfall to his advantage and signed treaties with the new sultan, Suleiman, by which Thessalonike and other territories returned to Byzantine control.[1484]

Transience: Lemnos, Lesbos, and Thessalonike

After his return from the West, Manuel refused to delegate the responsibility for Thessalonike to John VII, for he harbored a profound distrust of his nephew and was afraid that he might pass the city back to the Turks. Instead, John and Eirene were exiled to Lemnos,[1485] and from there they soon moved to Lesbos, the home of Eirene's family. John and Francesco Gattilusio decided to attempt to take Thessalonike by force.[1486] Hostilities between the two emperors apparently continued until the indispensable Marshall Boucicaut managed to reconcile them in October 1403. The agreement that was drawn up on that occasion stated that John would move to Thessalonike and assume the title 'emperor of all Thrace.'[1487] The ivory pyxis preserved in Dumbarton Oaks (Ill. 9) may commemorate this important act of reconciliation. The pyxis bears the figures of two emperors, two empresses, and two young princes, none of whom have been identified with any certainty. In his article, Nikolas Oikonomides suggested that one group may represent Manuel II, his wife Helene, and their son John while the other may depict John

1481 Miller mistakenly calls her 'Eugenia' at the time of her sojourn in Constantinople in 1400–1403. Miller (1913), 415.

1482 It has also been speculated that John and Eirene had a daughter, who later married Lucas Notaras. See Runciman (1966). Compare with Bakalopoulos (1959), 15 f. Mešanović (1996), 70.

1483 For a critical evaluation of this report, see Wirth (1965), 598 ff. Nicol (1972B), 326.

1484 Wirth (1965), 595 f.

1485 According to Doukas (*Doukas*, 111 (XVIII,1)), he was 'exiled' to Lemnos; according to Clavijo (*Clavijo*, 52), he was 'banished' to Stalimene, another name for Lemnos at that time. See Wirth (1965), 596. See also Miller (1913), 414. Nicol (1972B), 336.

1486 *Clavijo*, 51–53. Nicol (1972B), 336 f.

1487 For details, see Barker (1969), 244 f. Nicol (1972B), 337.

VII, Empress Eirene, and their son Andronikos on the occasion of John's assuming the government of Thessalonike.[1488]

As was the case with the empresses Eirene (Yolanda of Montferrat) and Anna of Savoy, Eirene Gattilusio found peace in Thessaly. Her husband strengthened the defenses of the Thracian cities and made pious donations to monasteries in Constantinople and Mount Athos on behalf of himself, his wife, and his father-in-law.[1489] He may also have minted coins: a preserved specimen bears the image of an emperor on the obverse and an empress and her son on the reverse. Gerasimov suggested in his study that the empress on the reverse was the wife of Manuel II, Helene Dragaš, with her son John.[1490] However, since the coin was struck in Thessalonike and intended for local circulation, it is also possible that it actually bears the likenesses of John VII, his wife, and their son.

The veil

This tranquil season came to an abrupt end when the son of the imperial couple, who was still a young child, died in 1407.[1491] A monody from that time suggests that Andronikos had already been proclaimed, or perhaps even crowned, co-emperor.[1492] (According to Dennis, this was the reason Manuel had banished his nephew's family to Lemnos in 1403.[1493]) The broken-hearted father died a year later,[1494] having taken monastic vows along with the name Joasaph. Soon afterwards, Manuel reassumed control of Thessalonike and possibly allocated to Eirene the castle of Kotzinos on the Lemnos coast as her widow's portion.[1495] The empress, who at some point became the nun Eugenia,[1496] may have moved to Lemnos temporarily, but she eventually moved to the Byzantine capital, where she may

1488 Oikonomides (1977), 330.
1489 *Actes de Lavra* III, 148.
1490 Gerasimov (1956), 116.
1491 See the monody written on the death of this child: Μονῳδία ἐπὶ τῇ τελευτῇ κυροῦ Ἀνδρονίκου βασιλέως τοῦ Παλαιολόγου, υἱοῦ τοῦ κυροῦ Ἰωάννου τοῦ ἀνεψιοῦ τοῦ βασιλέως κυροῦ Μανουὴλ, ἑπτὰ ἔτους ὄντος in: Dennis (1967), 175–187, for the edited text see 181–187. See also Barker (1969), 465 ff.
1492 " (. . .) ἐν ἄλλαις ἐλπίσιν ὄντες οἱ εὐσεβεστάτοι καὶ ἅγιοι βασιλεῖς καὶ σοῦ γεννήτορες καὶ εἰς σὲ μόνον εὐφραινόμενοι καὶ ἀγαλλόμενοι καὶ διάδοχον θαρροῦντες ἔχειν (. . .)." *Cod. Vindob. phil.* gr. 241, fols. 133–133v. in: Dennis (1967), 181.
1493 Dennis (1967), 180. For details, possible explanations, and literature, see Barker (1969), 241 ff., 466.
1494 September 22, 1408. For details and literature, see Barker (1969), 278, fn. 137.
1495 For a full explanation, see Wright (2014), 417 f., see also fn. 20. Miller (1913), 422 (Miller calls the castle Kokkinos). He, in turn, indicated *Chroniques gréco-romanes*, 199, which makes no direct reference to Eirene.
1496 Oikonomides (1968), 28, fn. 15.

have been allowed to live in the circle of the imperial family whom she could no longer threaten. There is a poem that refers to the empress by her monastic name (Eugenia), along with other living members of the Palaiologan clan, providing further evidence that she spent her final years in Constantinople.[1497]

The details of Eirene-Eugenia's final years remain unclear. She may have entered one of the nunneries in the capital although the sources do not mention it. The fact that she was later buried in a male monastery suggests that, like other late Byzantine empresses, she lived a pious life in a private residence. Eirene-Eugenia witnessed the remaining years of Manuel's rule and saw his heir, John VIII, depart for the Council of Ferrara-Florence although she did not live to see his return. She died on January 1, 1440,[1498] and her death was allegedly foretold by the appearance of a bright comet.[1499] In the middle of a sudden snowstorm, her body was carried for eternal rest to the Pantokrator Monastery, the traditional burial ground of the imperial family. The wording of Sphrantzes's chronicle suggests that Eirene-Eulogia was buried together with the third wife of John VIII, Maria of Trebizond, who had died two weeks earlier on December 17, 1439.[1500]

Although the available information indicates that the empress died in peace with the Orthodox Church, Eirene does not appear in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*[1501] (which does contain the name of her husband). The omission may have a more complex explanation than mere forgetfulness on the part of the clergy in Hagia Sophia. In 1439, representatives of the Orthodox Church signed an act of union with the Catholics in the hope of receiving military aid from the West. As could be expected, the union provoked another wave of opposition in Byzantine society; consequently, most of the names of the Byzantine emperors and empresses of the period were not added to the list in the *Synodikon*.[1502]

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1497 Goar (1647), 81. Brightmann (1896), 552: "Ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας κράτους νίκης καὶ διαμονῆς τῶν εὐσεβεστάτων καὶ φιλοχρίστων βασιλέων ὑμῶν, τῆς εὐσεβεστάτης καὶ φιλοχρίστου δεσποίνης ἡμῶν Ὑπομονῆς μοναχῆς, τῆς εὐσεβεστάτης καὶ φιλοχρίστου δεσποίνης ἡμῶν Εὐγενίας μοναχῆς, τῶν εὐσεβεστάτων καὶ φιλοχρίστων βασιλέων ἡμῶν Ἰωάννου καὶ Μαρίας."

1498 *Sphrantzes*, 86 (XXIV,3).

1499 *Syropoulos*, 542 (IX,20).

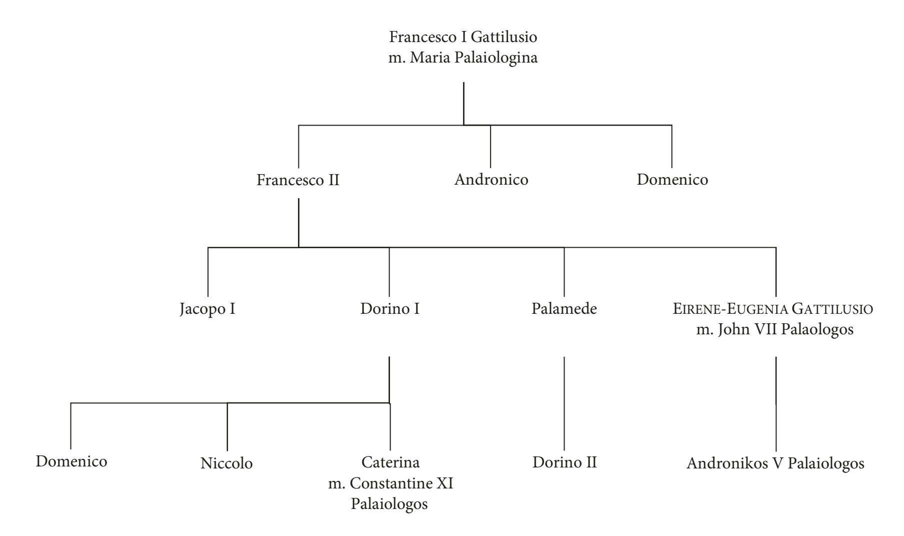
1500 Sphrantzes mentions the deaths of Maria of Trebizond and Eirene-Eugenia Gattilusio along with their dates. Afterwards, he claims that "they were buried in the Monastery of the Pantokrator during a terrible winter storm." ("αἱ καὶ ἐτάφησαν ἐν τῇ τοῦ Παντοκράτορος μονῇ, καὶ σφοδροῦ εἴπερ ποτὲ χειμῶνος τότε γενομένου (. . .)." *Sphrantzes*, 86 (XXIV,3), (trans.) *Philippides, Sphrantzes*, 52 (XXIV,3)). It is sudden snowstorm not very common in the city on the Bosporus that suggests that the two empresses were buried at the same time.

1501 *Gouillard, Synodikon*, 103.

1502 For details on empresses who do or do not appear in the *Synodikon*, see Melichar (2017A).

The wife of John VII is an elusive empress, whose entire life may be summarized in a very few sentences from the perspective of the sources; therefore, she can only be imagined (and that tentatively) as an unassuming, patient, and forgiving woman, who was able to find reconciliation with the family of Manuel II after her husband's death. There is little conspicuous about her except, perhaps, the length of her widowhood. While her marriage lasted some eleven or twelve years, she went on to spend another thirty-two years as a widow and a nun, a black silhouette inside the walls of Constantinople.

Tab. 5: *A Selected Genealogy of the Gattilusio Family. Based on Luttrell (1986), 103–112. ODB II, 824.*



XIII Anna of Moscow: The Child Empress (1414–1417)

Since Emperor Manuel had no fear of any immediate attack, he wished to arrange a wedding for his son John. He sent to the king of Rus, requesting his daughter for John's bride.[1503]

Doukas

The princess from the far northeast

The opening chapters of the story of the little Rus princess do not differ greatly from those of other foreign consorts of late Byzantine emperors. In the relatively peaceful years following the Battle of Ankara in 1402, the young heir to the Byzantine throne reached marriageable age, allowing Emperor Manuel II to begin the search for a bride for his son. Naturally, the young woman would need to bring a useful alliance to the empire on the Bosphorus. Acknowledging the growing power of the Grand Principality of Moscow,[1504] Manuel applied to the Grand Prince, Vasilij I Dmitrievič Ivanovič of the Don, for the hand of his daughter.[1505] In 1409, Metropolitan Photios arrived in Constantinople to negotiate the union.[1506] The negotiations proceeded at a leisurely pace, perhaps because the princess was only about six years old at the time. The young bride, whose baptismal name is a matter of conjecture, arrived in the imperial city in 1411,[1507] and the sources refer to her as 'Lady Anna.'[1508] The celebrated arrival of Anna of Moscow in the empire's

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1503 *Doukas*, 133, 3 (XX,3). (Trans.) *Magoulias, Doukas*, 112, 3.

1504 For an important study evaluating the Byzantine-Rusian marriages of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, see Kazhdan (1988–1989).

1505 On Anna's marriage within the context of Manuel II's foreign policy, see Runciman (1981), 276.

1506 His presence is clearly proved by his signature on (a still unpublished) synodal act dated to August 1409. *Vat.* gr. 1858, f. 42v. For further details on Photios, see Hilsdale (2014), 310. On Byzantine-Rusian ecclesiastical relations, see Tinnefeld (1974).

1507 *Suprasl'ski Spisok*, 55. *Ermolinskaja letopis*, 143. *Moskovskij letopis*, 240. *Sofiiskaja pervyj letopis*, 258. Barker explains the long period between the negotiations and Anna's arrival as being the result of the Turkish wars of succession. Barker (1969), 345 (see also fns. 85, 86).

1508 It is quite possible that her baptismal name was Anna after her maternal grandmother, the wife of the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Vytautas the Great. See also Barker (1969), 345.

final decades offers an interesting contrast to the cheerless departure of another princess, Anna of Byzantium, the sister of Basil II, for Cherson to marry the Rusian[1509] ruler Vladimir five centuries earlier. But while the marriage of the first Anna helped to establish Christianity in the far northeast of Europe and provided her brother with military support against the rebel nobles Skleros and Phokas, Anna of Moscow had little to offer the Byzantine Empire as there was no powerful army ready to fight the Ottomans following in her wake.

It wasn't as though the princess's people were incapable of supplying such an army. Anna, who was born around the year 1403, came from an impressive family lineage. She was the daughter of the Grand Prince of Rus, Vasilij of the Don, and Sophie of Lithuania, who were married in 1391 in order to create a bond between powerful (and warring) neighbors, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Grand Principality of Moscow. Moreover, she was the granddaughter of both Vytautas of Lithuania and Dmitry (II) of the Don, the famous and powerful princes of two mighty realms in eastern Europe. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Rus was divided into a number of smaller principalities, which were gradually conquered by the Tatar (Mongol) khans. Even though the khans, who were known for their cruel treatment of their opponents and the bloody destruction of entire cities, managed to hold some of these territories for centuries, their power eventually began to wane. Sensing an opportunity to challenge the dominion of the Mongols, Anna's grandfather on her father's side, Dmitry (II) of the Don, ceased paying taxes and destroyed the Tatar armies led by Khan Mamaj in the Battle of Kulikovo in 1380. His victory opened the way for the gradual liberation of the Rus from the Tatar yoke, which was completed a century later (1480) by Ivan III.[1510] Following his triumph at Kulikovo, Dmitry acquired the title of Grand Prince, thereafter a hereditary appellation in his family, which was passed down to his son Vasilij I, Anna's father. On her mother's side, the princess was the granddaughter of the powerful Vytautas the Great, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, a sophisticated statesman who spread his reign deep into the territories of western Rus.

Unlike her grandparents, Anna did not have time to make a deep imprint on the country she had come to rule. Very little is known about her first years in Constantinople other than the fact that she was received into the lively household of her mother-in-law, Helene Dragaš, who brought her up together with her own younger children and, presumably, supervised her education. In this way, the young girl was enculturated and prepared for the role she would be expected to assume in the empire.

1509 I use 'Rusian' (describing the history and culture of the Rus) in contrast to 'Russian' and 'Russia,' which pertain to the multinational power of the early modern and modern periods.

1510 For details on the history of the Rus, see Vydra–Řoutil–Komendová *et al.* (2017), 40–58.

It was only after another delay of about three years that Anna finally became the wife of Prince John. By then, the young man was twenty-two years old, but his bride was just eleven.[1511] Though the sources do not record the precise date of their marriage, it must have taken place before July 25, 1414, when Anna's father-in-law, who was present at the ceremony, left the imperial city for Thassos.[1512] The young couple is depicted on the festive *sakkos* of Patriarch Photios, which was sent to Moscow from Byzantium and is preserved in the Kremlin.[1513] Anna's embroidered figure is wearing a golden *divitision* and *loros*, both decorated with red gems, and a high crown. She holds a *baion* in her right hand, and her silhouette is outlined in pearls (Ill. 12).

Despite this representation of the princess in full imperial regalia and an inscription that refers to her as the crowned empress, or *augousta*, Anna was not crowned during the wedding ceremony, allegedly owing to her youth.[1514] In reality, the omission may have had more to do with the fact that Manuel, who by delaying Anna's coronation also postponed the coronation of his son, was in no hurry to inaugurate a youthful successor that he regarded as inadequately prepared to assume imperial responsibilities. In one of his letters, the emperor described his son in the following terms:

> My son, the emperor, seems to himself to be a suitable emperor – but not for the present day. For he has large views and ideas and such as the times demanded in the heyday of the prosperity of his ancestors. But, now-a-days, as things are going with us, our empire needs, not an emperor, but an administrator. I am afraid that the decline of this house may come from his poems and arguments, for I have noted his propensities and what he thought to achieve with the Mustafa, and I have seen also the results of his doctrines, in what danger they have brought us.[1515]

The fact that she was not crowned did not prevent Anna from being referred to as empress by contemporary historiographers. Sphrantzes, the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy,* and the author of a short chronicle all call her *despoina*[1516] (a title generally used for empresses at this time). The use of this term for an uncrowned empress suggests that it was her proclamation and her marriage to the emperor's heir that provided the basis for her claim to this imperial title.

1511 *PLP*, n. 21349. See also Schreiner (1970), 294 f. On Anna's family, see also *Majeska, Travellers*, 311. Kislinger (1984), 107.

1512 *Sphrantzes*, 8 (IV,1). *Mazaris, Journey to Hades*, 80.

1513 On the role and history of this sakkos, see Hilsdale (2014), 268–332.

1514 *Doukas*, 133, 3 (XX,3).

1515 *Sphrantzes*, 82 (XXIII,7). For further details on John's life, work, and character, see Gill (1957), 152–170.

1516 *Sphrantzes*, 12 (V,2). *Gouillard, Synodikon*, 103. *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 639. *Doukas*, 133, 3 (XX,3).



Ill. 12: *John VIII Palaiologos (left), Anna of Moscow (right) embroidered on the 'major' sakkos of Metropolitan Photios, 1414–1417. Kremlin Museum, Moscow (TK-4) (Photo: Pavel Boček)*

The brief Bosphorus years

The sources offer no details regarding the next few years of Anna's life in the Byzantine capital, part of which she spent without her new husband, who had been sent to the Morea by his father in 1416 to defend Byzantine interests in the Peloponnese against Centurione Zaccaria of Achaia.[1517] Unexpectedly, a mere three

1517 Barker (1969), xxxiii.

years after her wedding, the empress contracted the plague and died in August 1417.[1518] Due to the contagious nature of her disease, she was probably avoided by other members of the imperial family and perhaps even abandoned by her own servants. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of the city were said to have mourned her passing, perhaps reacting to the untimely loss of youth, beauty, and the hope of an imperial heir.[1519] Joseph Bryennios, a philosopher and prolific writer, later wrote a monody on the empress.[1520]

Unlike most of the members of the Palaiologan family, who by this time were usually laid to rest in the Pantokrator Monastery, Anna was buried in the Convent of Lips with earlier generations of Palaiologans – as the worthy monk Zosima[1521] duly noted in his diary.[1522] This Zosima may have been part of the princess's original retinue and was apparently present in Constantinople at the time of her death or shortly thereafter. With the ceremonies concluded, Anna's name was inscribed in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* to be commemorated along with the other Byzantine empresses.[1523]

*

Embroidering her image into the festive *sakkos* of Patriarch Photios, the skilled fingers of unnamed Byzantine women depicted Anna of Moscow in imperial attire, wearing the high crown of the Byzantine empresses and holding the imperial scepter studded with precious stones. It was a testament to the hope for a lasting union between the ruling houses of Byzantium and Rus, a hope that was not realized until 1472 with the marriage of the Grand Prince Ivan III of Moscow and Zoe-Sophia Palaiologina, who became the parents of Vasilij III and the grandparents of Ivan IV.

Anna's comet-like appearance in Byzantine history contrasts sharply with the long reigns and political significance of foreign princesses like Anna of Savoy and Maria-Rita of Armenia. Still, although the Rusian princess came to Constantinople as a child and died shortly after reaching maturity (according to the standards of her time), her story places some colorful tiles in the mosaic of this period. Despite the fact that Anna's life and death represent only one small episode in the history of Byzantium, in the broader context of the subsequent marriages of John VIII, which likewise remained childless, her story carries a hint of foreboding – a foreshadowing of the inevitable decline of the thousand-year empire.

1518 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 639. Sphrantzes claims that she died in mid-August (*Sphrantzes*, 12 (V,2). Lambros (1907), 430. Barker (1969), 347.

1519 *Doukas*, 133, 3 (XX,3).

1520 *Bryennios* II, 291. (I was not able to access this text.) For further information on the life and work of Joseph Bryennios, see *PLP*, n. 3257.

1521 Zosima notes this fact in his travelogue, see *Majeska, Travellers*, 191.

1522 *Sphrantzes*, 12 (V,2). The burial place of the princess is also mentioned in the travelogue of Zosima the Deacon. See *Majeska, Travellers*, 189. *Khitrowo*, 205. Mango (1952), 181. See also Macridy *et al.* (1964), 266.

1523 *Gouillard, Synodikon*, 103.

XIV Sophia of Montferrat: The Ill-Favored Empress

(1421–1426)

It is not fancy hair, gold jewelry, or fine clothes that should make you beautiful. No, your beauty should come from within you—the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit that will never be destroyed and is very precious to God.

1 Peter 3:3–4

Introduction

After the premature death of Anna, the young princess of Rus, Emperor Manuel had to find a new bride for his successor.[1524] With respect to the political situation, he was on good terms with Sultan Mehmed I (1413–1421); however, the emperor realized that peace between Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire was solely dependent on the personal, amicable relationship that existed between himself and the aging sultan. Watching as the Balkan principalities disintegrated under Ottoman military pressure, Manuel decided that the empire's prospects would be better served by strengthening its ties with the West. To facilitate his dealings with the courts of Italy, he renewed negotiations for a union of the Orthodox and Catholic churches.[1525] He also requested permission from Pope Martin V[1526] to search for Catholic wives for his sons. Hoping to finally heal the breach that had caused so many difficulties over the course of four centuries, the pope conceded the possibility of these marriages, providing that the brides would be allowed to maintain their confessions and keep priests of their own rite at their courts.[1527] Papal permission in hand, Michael Eudaimonoioannes, who had been chosen as the emperor's ambassador, was then able to approach Italian courts regarding eligible partners for the imperial princes. Blood ties and political connections of long standing (and

1524 *Doukas*, 145 (XX,5).
1525 Loenertz (1939A), 31.
1526 *Annales ecclesiastici*, ad anno 1418, n. 17. *Syropoulos*, 106, 6 (II,6). Barker (1969), 325.
1527 *Hofmann, Epistolae*, doc. 2. Lambros (1907), 430. Diehl (1924), 273 ff.

perhaps a recommendation from the pope[1528]) eventually led to Michael's selecting the House of Montferrat.[1529]

The uncomely bride

Born into the family of Teodoro II Paleologo and Jeanne de Bar[1530] around 1394,[1531] the future empress[1532] was herself a member of the Palaiologan family, being the great-granddaughter of Theodore Palaiologos, the son of Andronikos II. She was betrothed to Philip Visconti in 1405,[1533] but the marriage never took place. Sophia remained unattached until 1420, when political exigencies lifted her to a position of utmost prominence in the Byzantine Empire. Little is known of her life before her journey to the Byzantine court. She may have lived, as was customary at the time, at the court of her fiancé in Milan until Philip cancelled the engagement (sometime before 1412).[1534] When the Byzantine ambassadors arrived in Montferrat, they were unable to speak with Sophia's father, who had died in 1418. Instead, her marriage was negotiated by her younger brother, John James. By the time the negotiations had been completed, the lady in question was twenty-six years old and no longer young by the standards of her day.

1528 Steven Runciman indicates that the marriage of John and Sophia was an attempt on Manuel's part to achieve better relations with Genoa. Runciman (1981), 276 f. Dr. Dabrowska contradicts this explanation by plausibly arguing that Sophia's father had already lost his power over Genoa by 1413. She suggests that the pope recommended Sophia due to his new alliance with the House of Montferrat, traditionally connected with the imperial (Ghibelline) party. Such a union would have presented a challenge to the Viscontis, who were considered a threat to the papal state at the time. The main advantage for the Byzantines was the full support of the pope himself. For further information, see Dabrowska (1996A), 181 f.

1529 The connection dates back to the reign of Manuel I, who made an alliance with the marquisate following the disastrous Battle of Myriokephalon (1176) in order to break the coalition of the Turks and the German emperor, Fridrich I Barbarossa. For a more detailed account of this connection, see Dabrowska (1996A), 179 f. For the political context of Sophia's marriage, see Runciman (1981), 276–278. Dabrowska (1996), 41. Barker (1969), 348.

1530 Sophia's mother, Jeanne de Bar, was a member of the high French aristocracy, being the granddaughter of the French king, John II, and his wife, Bona of Luxembourg.

1531 See the argumentation of Dabrowska (1996A), 181.

1532 *PLP*, n. 26389. For a very interesting reconstruction of Sophia's life, see Dabrowska (1996A). Nicol (1972B), 346. Wright (2013).

1533 Sturdza (1983), 540. Dabrowska (1996A), 181.

1534 In 1412, Philip Visconti married the widow of Facino Cane, Beatrice Lascaris di Tenda, in order to join neighboring lands to his territory.

Still, it was not the age but the appearance of the princess[1535] that so adversely affected her fate. The historian Doukas, who apparently knew the empress in person (as Dr. Dabrowska points out[1536]) and possibly facilitated a subsequent connection between the empress and the Genoese settlement in Pera, penned a detailed description, unique in the late Byzantine sources, of Sophia's appearance:

> The young woman was extremely well proportioned in body. Her neck was shapely, her hair blondish with braids flowing down to her ankles like glimmering golden streams. Her shoulders were broad and her arms, bosom, and hands well proportioned. Her fingers were transparent. She was tall in stature and stood very straight – her face and lips, the condition of her nose, and the arrangement of her eyes and eyebrows were extremely unprepossessing.[1537]

Laonikos Chalkokondyles also noted that Sophia was "pleasant in manner, but not attractive in face."[1538]

In the fall of 1420, Sophia sailed to Byzantium along with her future sister-in-law, Kleope Malatesta di Pesaro di Rimini,[1539] who was destined to marry Manuel's second son, Theodore. The two ladies boarded a Venetian galley in Chioggia and arrived in the Byzantine capital in November of the same year.[1540] Two months elapsed before Sophia finally wedded John, who was initially unwilling to go through with the arrangement. In her study of the ideal qualities attributed to Komnenian empresses, Barbara Hill acknowledges that "[the word] 'beautiful' was the most common epithet applied to imperial women of all ages and roles, excepting only mothers. (. . .) it was [also] the most heavily used adjective in all types of addresses to women, which implies that it was firmly embedded in the minds of its users as a suitable and important quality."[1541] John VIII, young and allegedly very handsome, an accomplished writer and poet, a

1535 In her study, Diana Wright suggests that being tall and strongly built, Sophia embarrassed John, who was slight of stature: "This blond woman who was probably a good bit taller and broader than John would have been difficult for him to deal with, even had she been a beauty." (Wright (2013), 138.)

1536 For the argument, see Dabrowska (1996A), 188 f.

1537 *Doukas*, 137 (XX, 6). (Trans.) *Magoulias, Doukas*, 113 (XX, 6). Doukas claims that it was Emperor Manuel who crowned the couple. If the historian's information is correct, it would have been a curious departure from tradition, for the senior emperor usually crowned his son who, in turn, crowned his wife. For the passage describing Sophia's handicap, I used the translation suggested by Diana Wright, in Wright (2013), 135.

1538 *Chalkokondyles* I, 192.

1539 For details, see *PLP*, n. 21385.

1540 *Sphrantzes*, 14 (VI,2). As Diana Wright noted, Sphrantzes does not mention the disfiguration of Sophia's face, most probably due to his loyalty to Emperor Manuel (Wright (2013), 1360).

1541 Hill (1996), 8 f. On the importance of beauty, see also Schreiner (1991), 189 ff.

capable military leader, and a passionate hunter,[1542] found beauty a *conditio sine qua non* in a bride.

Eventually, John bowed to the will of his father and married Sophia. The fact that his marriage would finally allow him to be crowned and confirmed in his position as co-emperor may have provided the necessary incentive. The ceremony, conducted by Patriarch Joseph, took place in Hagia Sophia on January 19, 1421,[1543] and according to the historian George Sphrantzes, it was magnificent.[1544] Based on the written permission provided by Manuel, Sophia did not change her confession; thus, for the first and only time in the history of the empire, a Catholic princess who had not converted to Orthodoxy was joined to an emperor in marriage. Unlike other Western brides, she did not receive a new name either, possibly because 'Sophia' appears in the Byzantine calendar and was therefore deemed acceptable, albeit unusual, for an empress of the Palaiologan period.[1545] The coronation of the young couple, during which the patriarch pronounced Sophia 'empress of the Romans,'[1546] presumably followed the wedding ceremony.

The unloved wife

Unfortunately, the marriage was not a happy one – if it was a marriage at all. John avoided the sight of his wife from the beginning and allegedly never consummated the union.[1547] Chalkokondyles noted that "[her husband, John VIII] did not live with her; he became hostile and disagreeable to her for a time, and the wife of the emperor [Sophia] noticed that her husband was behaving disagreeably and that she was very hateful to her husband."[1548] He soon found solace in the

1542 Gill (1957), 157. For John's reign, see Djurić (1984).

1543 *Doukas*, 145 (XX,5). For the dating, see Dölger (1936), 318. In reality, a marriage between an Orthodox prince and a Catholic princess was perceived as highly problematic. A century earlier, the learned bishop of Ochrida, Demetrios Chomatianos, ordered that Greek priests who sanctioned such a marriage be suspended. *Demetrios Chomatianos*, 713. Barker (1969), 349.

1544 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* II, 617, n. 65. *Sphrantzes*, 14 (VI,2). Doukas explains the delay by pointing out that "when the emperor [John] first laid eyes on her, he wanted to send her back to Italy to her father's home, but because of his affection for his father, Emperor Manuel, he could not bring himself to do so." *Doukas*, 137 (XX, 6). (Trans.) *Magoulias, Doukas*, 113 (XX, 6).

1545 *Syntagma* II, Balsamon's scholion to Canon 14 of the Council of Chalcedon (p. 253 f.) states that a Latin who wants to marry a Byzantine must renounce his or her faith. See also Troianos (1983), 100. According to Schmalzbauer, the name of the converting fiancée had to be in the Orthodox calendar. Schmalzbauer (1979), 219 f.

1546 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 98, n. 48.

1547 *Doukas*, 137 (XX, 6). *Chalkokondyles* I, 205. See also Dabrowska (2008), 44.

1548 *Chalkokondyles* I, 192.

arms of his mistresses[1549] and probably welcomed any excuse to be absent from the capital.[1550] He certainly did not show any interest in the woman behind the distorted face, a woman who may have been exposed (as Dr. Dabrowska suggests) to the classical art and learning that were so widespread in Renaissance Italy.[1551] Obviously, it never occurred to the young emperor that his wife's mind might offset whatever he found lacking in her face.

Despite the absence of affection, it seems that Sophia was not completely disconnected from the life of the court in the years following her wedding. History makes note of one occasion when she appears to have been charged with supervising the imperial wardrobe together with her mother-in-law. Another time, glad to receive news of her husband's return from Hungary,[1552] Sophia gave the messenger, the historian George Sphrantzes, a beautiful robe for his future wife.[1553] Still, not being Orthodox must have hindered her participation in the frequent religious festivities, and her absence or partial participation on these occasions would have forced her into the shadows.

Eventually, Sophia must have understood that she would never be able to win the love of her husband and assume her rightful, public role as empress. She gradually confined herself to her chambers, rejected by her husband and unpopular among the representatives of the Orthodox Church and her subjects because of her Catholic confession. Symeon, the archbishop of Thessalonike, clearly considered her marriage to Emperor John VIII a misused *oikonomia*, a concession that brought about divine wrath, as manifested by the Ottoman siege of Constantinople in 1422 (in reality, the sultan attacked Byzantium because the Byzantines had supported his brother against him[1554]), the ensuing famine, and further trouble with the Republic of Genoa:

> Now this [siege and famine], I think, was a disciplinary chastisement inflicted on it [Constantinople] by God for other reasons, but also to teach us not to have communion of any kind at all with those who are excommunicated by the Church. For you know what things happened at that time: how that woman of Italian race, who had neither submitted to the Church nor become its daughter, nor publicly recognized the

1549 *Pseudo-Sphrantzes*, 260, says, "Lady Sophia returned to her homeland as our emperor has shown no affection for her, but preferred other women, as Lady Sophia had not been endowed with beauty by nature." (Trans.) *Philippides, Sphrantzes*, 139, n. 4.

1550 In 1423, John VIII undertook a mission to Hungary to obtain military aid against the Turks from Sigismund of Hungary. For details, see *Sphrantzes*, 24 (XII, 3). Setton (1976–1981), II, 25.

1551 Dabrowska (1996A), 183. See also Kelso (1956), 44.

1552 John departed for Hungary on November 15, 1423, and returned in October of the following year. For details, see Gill (1957), 154.

1553 *Sphrantzes*, 28 (XIII,4).

1554 For details, see Malamut (2015), 85 f. Gill (1957), 158.

> Church's hierarchs as her fathers, nor confessed the Symbol of Faith of the Fathers in the right form in which it was drawn up, was simply received and proclaimed Empress of the Orthodox together with the faithful Emperor in violation of the sacred canons. Now this was something which many persons scrupulous about divine matters found hard to stomach at the time; they testified by this token that an ordeal would follow; and that in fact is how it turned out, for after a while the Emperors had a trying experience thrust upon them by the Italians. Everyone knows what initiatives detrimental to the Romans' interest the men from Genoa, as mentioned above, and others with them were up to at that time.[1555]

While Theodora Palaiologina,[1556] the niece of Michael VIII, was able to achieve an annulment of her marriage under similar conditions,[1557] Sophia had no such opportunity. Her position became even more precarious after her father-in-law, who had been her main ally in Constantinople, died in July 1425. While Sophia may have found solace in the company of the ladies and servants who had come with her from Italy and from the encouragement offered to her by her spiritual father and confessor, the Catholic friar William of Pera, her unhappy marriage and her lack of integration into the Byzantine court must have gradually grown into an unbearable personal burden.

Instead of patiently awaiting the end of her life semi-imprisoned in her chambers, Sophia decided to leave. On an August day in 1426, pretending that she wished to enjoy the gardens on the coast of the Bosphorus, she left the city with her Italian ladies-in-waiting and young men from her homeland. In the late afternoon, her Genoese accomplices boarded a bireme and sailed to meet the empress and her company. They invited Sophia to visit Pera and brought her over to that city, where the inhabitants welcomed her heartily. It is not certain whether this was her first visit to the Genoese city. In any case, she must have felt at home there, for the houses were well kept (unlike those in Constantinople) and their architecture was reminiscent of her homeland.[1558] Soon afterwards, "as the north wind began to blow," Sophia boarded a Genoese ship that apparently belonged to relatives of hers, the Spinolas, and sailed to Italy.[1559]

Doukas states that on learning of Sophia's departure for Pera, palace officials proposed to storm the city and bring her back. He also claims that Emperor Manuel, who was resolved to force his son no longer, prevented their intervention and that John openly "approved of what had taken place."[1560] Doukas's chronology is clearly

1555 *Symeon of Thess.*, 147.
1556 *PLP*, n. 21389.
1557 *Pachymeres* I, 155 (II,13).
1558 *Vasiliev, Pero Tafur*, 116.
1559 *Doukas*, 139 (XX, 6). (Trans.) *Magoulias, Doukas*, 113 f. (XX, 6). Sphrantzes (correctly) places the return of the empress to Italy in August 1426. *Sphrantzes*, 30 (XIV,2).
1560 *Doukas*, 139 (XX, 6). See also, Gill (1957), 155.

confused because at the time of Sophia's flight, Manuel had already been dead for over a year.[1561] Nevertheless, the report suggests that the young emperor fully supported his wife's 'escape' and may even have had a hand in it,[1562] which would, perhaps, explain the cryptic words uttered by the empress before she boarded the Genoese ship. According to the historian, Sophia took nothing with her except for the imperial crown with which she had been proclaimed empress. She allegedly said concerning the jewel, "This is the testimony that I was and am Empress of the Romans. I care not for precious treasure."[1563] This declaration could be understood in the sense that John was not merely aware of her plans to leave but had even offered his wife financial compensation so that she would not return to her home country destitute.[1564] Her parting words suggest that if such an offer was made, she had generously refused it, deciding to keep only her crown as proof of her reign and as a souvenir of the years she had lived in Byzantium.

After landing in Genoa, the empress spent her first days in Italy as a guest of the Spinola family[1565] before being festively welcomed by her brother the marquis and the nobles of Ferrara. However, as a married woman who had left her husband, her position in that society was awkward. Having already faced so much humiliation, she chose to spend her remaining days in peace in an environment where the outward appearance was not deemed important. Soon after her arrival in Italy, Sophia took the veil and entered a Catholic convent, where she lived for another eight years. She died on August 21, 1434,[1566] at the age of forty.

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Among her late Byzantine counterparts, Sophia stands out as an empress who failed to integrate into Byzantine society. While the fact that she did not accept Orthodoxy certainly played a decisive role in the outcome of her story, her choice to remain Catholic need not be taken as a sign of intractability on Sophia's part. Manuel himself probably did not wish to aggravate the pope by forcing the empress's conversion, and John may even have welcomed her unchanged confession as potential grounds for divorce.[1567] On the other hand, it is true that her failure to accept the religion of the empire does suggest a certain lack of commitment to Byzantium and its people. The second obstacle (and possibly the main one) to Sophia's integration was her face, which not only prevented her from winning

1561 Barker (1969), 348 f., fn. 96.
1562 Barker (1969), 403.
1563 *Doukas*, 139 (XX, 6). (Trans.) *Magoulias, Doukas*, 114 (XX, 6).
1564 Dabrowska (1996A), 189.
1565 *Annales Genuenses*, 302. Dabrowska (1996A), 189.
1566 Based on the admittedly inaccurate account of Sturdza (Sturdza (1983), 540), Dr. Dabrowska claims that Sophia died in Trino near Casale in 1437 (Dabrowska (1996A), 190).
1567 On the problem of mixed marriages in the light of the canonical rules, see Pitsakis (2003), (especially) 122–128.

the love of her husband but also disqualified her from playing her role as empress. She was not the first princess to suffer this fate. Many years before Sophia's birth, Princess Eudokia the Macedonian, the eldest daughter of Emperor Constantine VIII, although she was heiress to the Byzantine throne by right of birth, removed to a monastery after her face was disfigured, apparently by a childhood illness.[1568] Aesthetics did not govern the fates of women alone, however. In general, men without eyes or noses were not eligible for the throne either. The message of these examples is that an imperial face, whether male or female, had to be unblemished. In an age that predated the advent of plastic surgery, Sophia of Montferrat, a woman who fell far short of the culturally accepted standards of beauty, could never truly be accepted as empress of the Byzantine Empire.

1568 *Psellos* I, 62 (II,5). Garland (1999), 137.

XV Maria Komnene Kantakouzene Palaiologina: The Last Crowned Empress of Byzantium

(1427–1439)

At that time, they brought to the emperor as wife Maria Kantakouzene from Trebizond (…). Maria possessed a beauty which could not be found in her time. The emperor married her and loved her beyond measure because of her beauty and wisdom.[1569]

Ecthesis chronica

Introduction

Following the death of his father and the precipitate return of his second wife to Italy, where she became a nun, John VIII found himself free to select his own bride for the first time.[1570] The annulment of his marriage to Sophia, based on the claim that they had never lived together as husband and wife, enabled John to avoid the stigma of a third marriage, which was traditionally a controversial issue in the Orthodox Church. Doukas mentions that the man in charge of the quest, the future Cardinal Bessarion, began his search for a suitable bride in the neighboring state of Trebizond[1571] in 1426–1427. There he petitioned Emperor Alexios IV Komnenos (1417–1429) for the hand of his daughter Maria,[1572] a lady described in the sources as beautiful both in appearance and character.[1573] The situation in Asia Minor had been seriously destabilized by the death of Timur Lenk (Tamerlane) in 1405, and

1569 *Ecthesis Chronica*, 6. (Translation mine.)

1570 As Angeliki Laiou reminds us, "divorcing one's spouse in order to enter a monastery was perfectly acceptable, at least since the time of Justinian's novels 22 and 17. This *bona gratia* divorce allowed the remaining spouse to remarry." Laiou (1992A), 168. For John's reign, see Djurić (1984). On the reign of John VIII, see Nicol (1972B), 357–389.

1571 For details on the history, politics, and culture of Trebizond, see Karpov (2017).

1572 *PLP*, n. 21397. For an overview, see Nicol (1968), 171 f. and Papadopoulos (1938), 59. For the context of the marriage within the politics of Manuel II, see Runciman (1981), 278 f. Dabrowska (1996), 43 f. Gill (1957), 155. For a brief biography of the empress, see also Leszka–Leszka (2017), 385–389.

1573 *Doukas*, 139 (XX,7).



Ill. 13: *The restored Church of Hagia Sophia in Trebizond (now Trabzon, Turkey). (Photo: İhsan Deniz Kılıçoğlu). Original title: Photograph of the restored Hagia Sopia Church in Trabzon, Turkey. Author: İhsan Deniz Kılıçoğlu – Own work. URL: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Hagia_Sophia,_Trabzon#/media/File:Hagia_Sophia_Trabzon.jpg. Lincence: CC-BY-SA 3.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)*

Trebizond was facing an invasion by Kara Yusuf, the ruler of the Kara Koyunlu Turks. Alexios needed allies and was pleased to accept the Byzantine proposal.

Maria was born around 1404 to Alexios and his Byzantine wife, Theodora Komnene Kantakouzene. She had four siblings: John (IV), Alexander (also known as Skantarios), David, and a sister who married a Turkish prince.[1574] The sources, including the above quotation from *Ecthesis Chronica*, claim that Maria's appearance was remarkable (see Ill. 14).[1575]

The Byzantine ambassadors arrived in Trebizond at a time when the situation at court and within the imperial family was very unstable. (For a view of the beautiful St. Sophia Church in Trebizond, now Trabzon, Turkey, see Ill. 13.) In 1425–1426, a

1574 See the study of Michel Kuršanskis, Kuršanskis (1979), especially 239, 246.

1575 *Ecthesis Chronica*, 6. Her face was supposedly captured by the Italian painter Pisanello in a fresco in the Church of St. Anastasia in Verona. The fresco depicts St. George in the company of a princess from Trebizond.

conflict had flared up between Alexios and his eldest son, John, who had murdered his father's treasurer after accusing him of committing adultery with the empress (John's mother). The prince also made an attempt on the lives of his parents; however, the nobility rose up in their defense, and John was forced to flee to Georgia.[1576] Whether due to these traumatic events or for other reasons, Maria's mother, the beautiful Empress Theodora, died in 1426. Being separated from his eldest daughter so soon after the death of his wife must have been difficult for Alexios. Even so, an imperial marriage for Maria would offer not only political advantages but also an opportunity to remove her from the scene of events that must have been deeply troubling for her.

The last empress of Byzantium

Maria arrived in Constantinople by boat on August 29/30, 1427,[1577] landing near the Kosmidion Monastery outside the northern city walls.[1578] She married John VIII in September of that year.[1579] Their marriage was consecrated by Patriarch Joseph II, who blessed the union in the customary fashion and proclaimed Maria "the empress (*despoina*) of the Romaioi."[1580] The newlyweds were soon separated by the emperor's departure for the Peloponnese, where he had to deal with a conflict between the Greeks of Mistra and the prince of Clarentza, Carlo Tocco. The new bride stayed behind in the capital while her husband assumed command of his armies, returning a year later in October 1428.[1581]

Their marriage was apparently a happy one; in fact, the author of the *Ecthesis Chronica* writes that the emperor loved his wife 'excessively' for her beauty and wisdom.[1582] Although her name appears on buildings and in the dating of various documents, there is no evidence that Maria used her gifts to influence the political or religious matters of her day.[1583] She may have been preoccupied with the tragic events that took place in her homeland after her departure. In response

1576 Miller (1968), 81.
1577 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 630, n. 6. *Sphrantzes*, 30 (XIV,3).
1578 See also Leszka–Leszka (2017), 386.
1579 *Sphrantzes*, 30 (XIV,4). See also Gill (1957), 154.
1580 *Doukas*, 139, 7 (XX,7).
1581 Gill (1957), 154.
1582 *Ecthesis Chronica*, 6.
1583 Little is known about the interests and activities of the beautiful Maria. Among the sources, there is a poem dedicated to the Mother of God by a Maria Komnene Palaiologina, whose identity is not clear and who apparently dedicated a golden robe and an ornamental holy book to the Mother of God. The possibility that this work was produced thanks to the patronage of the empress cannot be ruled out. As the poet did not identify her as a 'Kantakouzene,' it is impossible to distinguish her with any certainty from other members of the imperial family who bore the same name. For details and argumentation, see Papageorgiou (1894), 326–329.

to the treacherous behavior of John, Emperor Alexios made his second son, Alexander, his heir. In September/October 1429, the rebellious firstborn returned to Trebizond with the help of the Genoese of Caffa and succeeded in bribing the nobility and orchestrating the murder of his father.[1584] Shortly thereafter, John ascended the throne. Forced to flee, Alexander eventually found refuge with his sister in Constantinople, where the Spanish traveler Pero Tafur met with him in 1437.[1585]

Outside the palace

In 1433, Bertrandon de la Broquière, a pilgrim and traveler from the West, saw the beautiful empress at church during the liturgy. He was so charmed by her appearance that he decided to stay and wait for another opportunity to see her. At length, his patience was rewarded, and he was able to observe Maria as she left the palace to dine elsewhere. Later, he described the event in his travelogue:

> I did not eat or drink the whole day until the Vespers (. . .) to see the empress, who dined in an inn not far away because she seemed so beautiful to me at the church that I wished to see her outside and [watch] how she rode a horse. She did not have with her more than two ladies and two or three noblemen and three such men as the Turks have to guard their wives. And when she came out from the inn a bench was brought on which she stepped and then a very handsome horse (*ronchin*) saddled with a richly decorated saddle was brought for her. One of the noblemen approached the bench and took the long coat which she wore and went to the other side of the horse and lifted the coat as high as he could. She then placed the foot in the stirrup, and like a man mounted the horse. He then placed the coat over her shoulders and put one of the long, pointed hats of Greece which bears along the said top three golden feathers and which fitted her very well. She seemed to me as beautiful as before. (. . .) She wore make up, which was unnecessary because she was young and fair-skinned. In each ear she had a hanging earring, large and flat bearing several stones, mostly rubies. And after the empress mounted the horse also the two ladies who were with her and who were also beautiful were dressed in coats and hats and they drove to the palace of the emperor, which is called the Blacherns (. . .).[1586]

The message of the comet

In addition to the death of Maria's father and the disturbing events that had taken place in Trebizond, the Byzantine Empire was facing difficulties of its own:[1587] in

1584 For the dating of this event, see Laurent (1955A).
1585 *Pero Tafur*, 116. See also Kuršanskis (1979), 239 f.
1586 *Voyage de l'Outremer*, 155 ff. Malamut (2013A), 657.
1587 For further details, see, for example, Nicol (1972B), 357–390.



Ill. 14: *Maria of Trebizond in St. George and the Princess, 1433–1435. Antonio Pisanello, fresco, Pellegrini Chapel, Church of St. Anastasia, Verona. Original title: Pisanello 011. Author: Pisanello. URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Despina_Khatun#/media/File:Pisanello_011.jpg. Lincence: Public domain*

1430, Thessalonike fell once again into Turkish hands, and soon afterwards, an important Epirote city called Ioannina surrendered to the sultan. Compelled by the desperate political situation, John VIII left for Ferrara in 1348 and for Florence the following year, intending to conclude an ecclesiastical union with the Catholic Church at a new ecumenical council. In this way, he hoped to acquire the papal blessing for Western military support against the Turks.[1588]

1588 For details on the council, see the account of Syropoulos (*Syropoulos*). Gill (1957), 163–169. Nicol (1972B), 375 f. Geanakoplos (1989A).

It seems that Maria and her mother-in-law, Helene Dragaš, governed the capital in John's absence.[1589] John apparently valued their advice, for when Patriarch Joseph died in Florence, John refused to name a new patriarch until he had learned whom these two women considered suitable for the post. Needless to say, his hesitation angered the Orthodox bishops.[1590] The outcome of the Council of Ferrara-Florence was disappointing for the Byzantines: instead of offering help, the pope insisted the patriarch recognize his supremacy, and the Latin theologians spent months attempting to prove that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son rather than from the Father alone. (The *filioque* controversy remains a point of contention between Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians to this day.)

While her husband was busy with the negotiations, Maria became ill. The sources do not name the disease she suffered from, but it would end her life. This bitter truth was said to have been foretold in the heavens by the appearance of a comet. (Another celestial harbinger of death would be credited with predicting the demise of Eirene Gattilusio, the wife of Maria's husband's cousin, just two weeks later.)[1591] Orphaned and childless, she died on December 17, 1439,[1592] and was buried on the same day as Eirene in the imperial mausoleum in the Pantokrator Monastery despite a raging storm. Information regarding her burial place is recorded in one of the so-called Byzantine short chronicles, which describes Maria as a "woman of all virtue" and requests that the reader pray for the empress's memory to remain eternal and for God to grant her a place "among the souls of the saints."[1593]

In the absence of the emperor, it would have fallen to the senior empress, Helene Dragaš, to organize the funeral of her daughter-in-law, a ceremony that was surely celebrated with all due honors. Although beautiful, the monody John Eugenikos wrote in memory of the empress[1594] contains neither information about Maria's life nor details about her 'many good deeds,' a shortcoming typical of works of this nature. Sideras, the editor of the piece, notes that the text does not address the emperor, who was still in Italy at the time,[1595] but rather the members of the imperial family who were present at Maria's funeral.

1589 *Syropoulos*, 396 (VIII,7). Maria, along with her mother-in-law, sent officials to her husband to inform him about the situation in Constantinople and the Turkish threat.

1590 *Syropoulos*, 511 (X,24).

1591 *Syropoulos*, 542 (XI,20).

1592 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 640, 8. *Sphrantzes*, 86 (XXIV,3). *Doukas*, 269 (XXXI,7). Mercati (1937–1984), 423 ff., for the inscription, see p. 424. *Syropoulos*, 542 (XI,20). Lambros (1907), 430. The cause of death is unknown, but the plague, which appeared in Constantinople periodically in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, cannot be ruled out.

1593 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 645, 12.

1594 *John Eugenikos*, 112 ff.

1595 Sideras (1982), 353.

Word of Maria's death apparently reached the emperor's counsellors on the island of Lemnos during their return journey.[1596] However, John's entourage decided not to reveal the news to their master for fear that his desire to mourn his wife would delay their departure from the island for a fortnight.[1597] John returned to the capital on February 1, 1440, six weeks after the passing of his wife, and it fell to his mother to break the news.[1598] John mourned Maria bitterly and was buried in her tomb in the Pantokrator after his own death in October 1448.[1599]

The nun Makaria?

It has been alleged that Maria accepted the veil on her deathbed along with the name Makaria.[1600] Except for the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, which does indeed close with the line "Maria, our lady, who assuming the divine and angelic dress became the nun Makaria, eternal be her memory,"[1601] no other source confirms this information, casting doubt on the claim that the third wife of John VIII died a nun.[1602] There is, however, evidence to support the proposition that the name in the *Synodikon* denotes a different Maria, Maria of Bulgaria, the wife of Andronikos IV.[1603] The wife of John VIII does appear in the list of pious empresses in the *Synodikon* in a joint inscription along with the name of her husband on line 778. The inscription indirectly confirms that Maria did not become a nun before her death, for it calls the empress "*augousta* Maria"[1604] and not by a monastic name. Considering the high honor of the monastic estate in Byzantine society and the fact that the names of all the other empresses who had taken the veil are duly mentioned in the document, the authors of the *Synodikon* would have been sure to include this piece of information had Maria had a monastic name.

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1596 *Ecthesis Chronica*, 7.
1597 *Syropoulos*, 542 (XI,20).
1598 *Doukas*, 269 (XXXI,7). *Syropoulos*, 544 (XI,23). Both the emperor and his brother Demetrios lost their wives while in Italy. On their return journey, neither was told that his own wife had died; each brother was merely apprised of the demise of his sister-in-law. Syropoulos reports that the courtiers left it to Empress Helene Dragaš to break the news to her sons.
1599 *LPP* IV, 90 f.
1600 *PLP*, n. 21397.
1601 *Gouillard, Synodikon*, 103.
1602 None of the following sources, which are otherwise well informed, contains any information about Maria taking the veil. *Syropoulos*, 542 (XI,20). *Sphrantzes*, 86 (XXIV,3). Mercati (1937–1984), 423 ff. Lambros (1907), 430. *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 640, 8. *Doukas*, 269 (XXXI,7).
1603 For details, see the biography of Maria of Bulgaria. For further details, see Melichar (2017A).
1604 *Gouillard, Synodikon*, 95.

Like the earlier wives of John VIII, Anna and Sophia, Maria of Trebizond made only a brief appearance on the stage of Byzantine history during the empire's most turbulent years. Little is known about this woman of surpassing beauty except that traumatic events plagued the family of her birth, love and respect marked her relationship with her husband, and death found her early at the age of about thirty-four. Though still without an heir, John VIII never remarried, preferring to designate his younger brother Constantine as the new emperor shortly before his own death.[1605]

Maria took her last breath in an imperial city that was gradually being encircled by Turkish armies. Her mother-in-law presumably saw to her needs in her final hours (providing that the nature of her disease allowed this) and then interred her in the Pantokrator mausoleum of the Palaiologans. For Maria, who had already suffered so much, an early death mercifully spared her the further heartache of the empire's last, desperate years. Had she lived, she would have been forced to flee or stand and watch as her brother-in-law Constantine XI led his vain defense while the walls of the once mighty city crumbled beneath the Turkish onslaught.

1605 For details, see *PLP*, n. 21500. For information on his marriages, see Lampros (1907).

Part 2: Roles and Rituals

The second part of this study has been divided into five chapters and can be viewed as a sort of extended conclusion, whose aim is to summarize and develop the most important information and themes from the fifteen biographical chapters of Part One. The first chapter of this section focuses on the imperial bride, especially the selection process and the rituals that preceded the conclusive acknowledgment of her position as empress. The chapters that follow inquire into the ceremonial role of the late Byzantine empresses, their role in public life, and their involvement with the Orthodox Church. The final chapter briefly examines the stages of life of the imperial consorts along with related social roles.

XVI The Transformation: Becoming an Empress in Late Byzantium

Lord our God, King over all who reign and Lord of those who exercise government,
who, through your prophet Samuel, chose David your servant and anointed him king of your people Israel,
listen to the supplication of your unworthy ones, and look from your holy dwelling at your faithful servant N., whom you elected as the empress of your holy nation, bought by the precious blood of your only Son.
Anoint her with the oil of joy; give her strength from above;
place on her head a crown of precious stones; bless her with long days; place in her right hand the scepter of salvation; seat her on the throne of justice; arm her with the armor of your Holy Spirit; make her arms strong; and make subject to her all the barbaric nations.
Sow your fear in her heart and compassion towards her subjects; preserve her in immaculate faith; show her as the uncompromising guardian of the teachings of your holy, catholic Church so that, judging your people with justice and the poor with discernment, she saves the children of the indigents and also becomes an heiress of your heavenly rule. For yours is the power, the reign and the glory.[1606]

The prayer over the newly crowned empress in the middle Byzantine period according to the Euchologion

Personal merit versus advantage to the empire

While many Byzantine emperors were born into their station in life, the vast majority of Byzantine empresses were 'created' by means of a complex process in which intention, opportunity, and chance each played an important role. Except for situations where the dynasty had run out of male heirs and the imperial line continued through the daughters, who transferred their own legitimacy to another

1606 For the edited text, see Arranz (1990), 93, 95. Translation mine. For details on the euchologion, see *ODB* II, 738. The oldest manuscript of the Euchologion (prayer book) is dated to the mid-eighth century.

dynasty through marriage or adoption (which was never the case during the Palaiologan period),[1607] the making of an empress began with the selection of a suitable bride.[1608]

In general, there were two fundamental approaches to choosing an imperial bride in Byzantium: considering/assessing a lady's personal qualities or focusing on the political advantages a particular alliance could afford the empire. While the latter aspect was a factor in nearly every choice to some degree, the former was most evident in the famous (albeit disputed) bridal shows of the middle Byzantine period.[1609] As described in the sources, these events were usually organized by the reigning empress, who was often the regent, mother, or stepmother[1610] of the future groom. She ordered the most beautiful women in the empire to be brought to the capital and then personally surveyed the candidates, gathering the information she needed to play a decisive role in selecting her own successor. (Naturally, the young emperor/heir was also involved in the process to some extent.)[1611] Besides beauty,[1612] virtue, Orthodoxy, and family background, the senior empress naturally wished for a daughter-in-law who would support and perhaps even further her own policies and beliefs (as in the cases of the middle Byzantine iconophile empresses Euphrosyne, the wife of Michael II, and Theodora, the wife of Theophilos).[1613] Whether or not the bridal shows actually took place, it is certain that a number of early and middle Byzantine empresses chose consorts for their sons/charges with the aim of securing women capable of fulfilling the many duties of an empress – marital, parental, and representative. And because physical beauty was always highly prized in a ruler, it is likewise certain that imperial brides were judged by their appearance in one way or another during the selection process.

1607 For a detailed examination of the means by which empresses 'made' emperors, see Hill–James–Smythe (1994). Laiou (1992A), especially 165.

1608 On the 'method of marriage' under the Komnenos dynasty, see Hill (1999), 120–151.

1609 The historicity of the bridal shows of the Byzantine emperors has been hotly debated by Byzantine scholars. It has been upheld by Warren Treadgold (Treadgold (1979) and Treadgold (2004)), Gilbert Dagron (Dagron (2003), 47 f.), Lynda Garland (Garland (1999), 5), and recently by Elisabeth Malamut (Malamut (2016A), 330 ff.). The existence of the shows was rejected by Paul Speck (Speck (1978), 203–208 and Speck (1999)), Lenart Rydén (Rydén (1985)), and Martha Vinson (Vinson (1999) and Vinson (2004)). For interesting comments on the topic of bridal shows, see Hans (1988). For a general overview, see Leszka–Leszka (2017), 58–61.

1610 Kislinger (1983), see especially120f., 136. The important role of the senior empress in selecting her successor is also stressed by Gilbert Dagron (Dagron (2003), 48).

1611 For details and literature, see *ODB* I, 323 f.

1612 While the historicity of bridal shows has been contested, the importance of beauty in a candidate for empress in Byzantium is generally accepted. See, for example, Schreiner (1991), especially 189 ff. Hill (1996), 8 f.

1613 For the considerations of the empresses who organized the bridal shows, see Treadgold (2004), 422. Treadgold (1979), 347.

Interestingly, the descriptions of the bridal shows do not mention foreign women having been invited to participate (a very different approach to the question of imperial marriage than is evidenced by the unions of the Palaiologan era).[1614] Warren Treadgold probably correctly traces the shows' origins to Charlemagne's decision not to wed his daughter Rotrude to Constantine VI, thereby forcing the mother of the disappointed bridegroom to seek his bride elsewhere.[1615] Only women of Byzantine background were among the prospects subsequently brought to the palace by the empress Eirene. Perhaps having been snubbed by one Western emperor, she simply did not want to risk another international scandal. Whatever her reasons, a precedent had been set, and later senior empresses followed it. In addition to being anchored in tradition, seeking a bride from among women of the empire most likely had another, practical basis. Foreign princesses would bring with them the foreign customs so dreaded by Constantine VII[1616] and would need to learn a new language, adjust to the Orthodox rite, and accept new modes of behavior as well as requiring time to adjust to the climate, culture, and etiquette of the Byzantine court. Senior empresses admittedly had agendas of their own; nevertheless, when charged with the responsibility of selecting (and possibly even training) their successors, they probably preferred Byzantine women simply for the convenience that a shared language and cultural background provided.[1617] Moreover, local women were dependent on the senior empress's support for their selection and, consequently, could be expected to repay their "debt" with gratefulness and loyalty. Similar family background[1618] (e.g., the provincial aristocracy) and doctrinal preferences (e.g., iconophily) could also play an important role.[1619] For these reasons, the majority of middle Byzantine empresses prior to the rule of the Komnenos dynasty were of Byzantine origin.[1620] Incidentally, another advantage

1614 On the rarity of foreign brides in early Byzantium, see Mc Clanan (2002), 20. Garland (1999), 6.

1615 "(. . .) it was probably Irene who inaugurated the custom as assertion of imperial pride and self-sufficiency, to show that her son could marry well without help from the untrustworthy and barbaric Franks." Treadgold (1979), 335. See also Garland (1999), 80 f.

1616 For the quotation and the citation, see *De administrando imperio*, 70 f. (13).

1617 Writing about early and middle Byzantine empresses, Lynda Garland observed something similar. For details, see Garland (1999), 223.

1618 The endogamous marriages of Herakleios and his son, Herakleios Constantine, were an extreme example of family-centered choice. For details, see Garland (1999), 70 f.

1619 Professor Treadgold mentions that these two objectives played an important role in Empress Euphrosyne's choice of Theodora as a bride for her stepson Theophilos. For details, see Treadgold (1975), 338 f.

1620 Garland (1999), 180. For an overview of Byzantine empresses, see Garland (1999), Table 1, 229–231.

of the bridal shows would have been that they could make the choice of a bride seem random (decided by beauty) rather than deliberate. This would free rulers from accusations that they were making an alliance with a particular aristocratic family, an action that carried the risk of alienating the others.

Despite the advantages implied by these practical considerations, only one late Byzantine empress was chosen with respect to her personal qualities. She was Eirene Asenina, apparently carefully handpicked by Theodora Kantakouzene, an eminent noblewoman, to marry Theodora's only son. Although Theodora was a mere relative of the imperial family and not a ruler in her own right, her choice of a bride for her son reflects much of the logic employed by some of the middle Byzantine senior empresses in selecting their successors. Theodora certainly possessed excellent judgment as well as the ability to pass on her skills and knowledge. (The reader may remember how she mentored Anna of Savoy and helped her rule the empire when Andronikos III was absent from the capital.) Ultimately, having received thorough training from her mother-in-law, Eirene rose to become one of the most successful of the late Byzantine empresses – as the achievements recorded in her biography indicate.

Generally speaking, however, the selection of an imperial bride during the Palaiologan period was based on the material, military, and political advantages the candidate could offer the empire.[1621] In late Byzantium, such "promising" young women were nearly always sought abroad despite the admonition of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, who strictly discouraged alliances with foreign nations in his *De administrando imperio*:

> Never shall an emperor of the Romans ally himself in marriage with a nation of customs differing from and alien to those of the Roman order, especially with one that is infidel and unbaptized, unless it be with the Franks alone; for they alone were excepted by that great man, the holy Constantine, because he himself drew his origin from those parts; (. . .) But with any other nation whatsoever it was not to be in the power (of the emperors) to do this, and he who dared to do it was to be condemned as an alien from the ranks of the Christians and subject to the anathema, as a transgressor of the imperial laws and ordinances.[1622]

Interestingly, imperial marriages involving non-native women[1623] were almost always connected with a weak or unstable empire. Despite the logic of Constantine's prohibition (which sought to prevent foreign rulers from acquiring influence at the Byzantine court and so laying a foundation for later claims to the throne) and not long after it had been made, his grandson Basil II was forced to

1621 On Byzantine foreign marital policies, see Tinnefeld (1993). Macrides (1992).
1622 *De administrando imperio*, 70 f. (13).
1623 For a brief outline of imperial marriages with foreign princesses, see Kazhdan (1992), 17 f.

give his purple-born sister in marriage to a newly baptized Rusian[1624] prince in 988. The decision was based on the need to secure his northern border and ensure military support for his campaigns in the East. In the centuries that followed, emperors and their heirs occasionally had to marry foreign princesses to seal political or military coalitions, but it was only in the twelfth century that the Komnenos dynasty instituted a new marital "strategy" by bringing almost all of their empresses to Byzantium from abroad.[1625] In the words of Alexander Kazhdan, "by the twelfth century the attitude toward foreign marriages had drastically changed: marriage became a fundamental instrument of Byzantine diplomacy."[1626]

Palaiologan rulers continued this trend with very few exceptions. Due to the exigencies of the political situation,[1627] imperial consorts could no longer be selected by the empress, who had been able to personally observe and converse with the candidates in the women's quarters of the palace in earlier times. Instead, new brides were located by *raison d'état* as the emperor bent over maps or sat in council with advisers and foreign diplomats. Even though four late Byzantine empresses came from local, aristocratic families, three of them (Theodora Doukaina, Eirene Kantakouzene, and Eirene Palaiologina) did not marry imperial heirs or emperors but men of rank, who only later claimed the crown. Only one emperor 'by birth,' John V Palaiologos, married a Byzantine noblewoman (Helene Kantakouzene). This exceptional union did not signal a reversal of Palaiologan marital policies, however, but was meant to resolve a stalemate between the Palaiologans and the Kantakouzenes and create political stability in the aftermath of the Second Civil War (1341–1347). In several cases, the selection of the future empress was prompted by offers originating with foreign rulers desirous of concluding an alliance with the emperor. Such a situation existed in connection with the marriage of Michael IX, who was requested as a groom for the Epirote princess Thamar as well as for the daughters of the Cypriot and Armenian kings.[1628]

The historical employment of the aforementioned marital strategies (showing a preference for local or foreign brides respectively) was not wholly accidental. Rulers of a mighty empire could afford to marry local women – either to strengthen their position among the powerful Byzantine families or to secure a capable and

1624 Describing medieval Rus and distinguished from 'Russian,' which is used for the early-modern and modern state of Russia.

1625 For changes in Byzantine culture under the Komnenos dynasty, see Kazhdan–Epstein (1985). Macrides (1992). Hill (1999), 150. On mixed marriages of the Komnenos dynasty, see Nicol (1964), 162.

1626 Kazhdan (1992), 18. As Lynda Garland noted while reviewing the manuscript of this work, it was Maria of Alania, the Georgian bride of Michael VII and later Nikephoros III Botaneiates, a woman of great intelligence, learning, and beauty, who reversed the negative perception of foreign brides in Byzantine society.

1627 For details, see the Introduction.

1628 Gregoras also mentions the Latin initiative to wed the nominal Latin empress of Constantinople, Catherine of Courtenay, to Michael. *Gregoras* I, 193 f. (VI,8).

compatible partner, a woman who would be able to assume the duties of an empress (the most notable examples being Theodora, the wife of Justinian, and her niece Sophia). By contrast, the ruler of a declining empire was forced to seek his wife abroad to acquire military and economic aid for his government. The same paradigm shift may be observed in the marriages of the imperial daughters. Many princesses of the early and middle Byzantine periods were married within the empire to members of powerful families or to important officials and collaborators of the emperor. Anna Komnene reports that Emperor Alexios I actually laughed when a 'barbarian' ruler requested his daughter's hand in marriage.[1629] However, as the empire fell into decline, the daughters of the emperor were increasingly married abroad to secure the stability of borders and to create military alliances. This was the case for the majority of the Palaiologan imperial daughters as well as some of their relatives.[1630] Underlining the significance of this shift, a recent study has described a case of the opposite phenomenon. As the Ottoman Empire became increasingly powerful, the sultans ceased to wed their daughters to neighboring Muslim rulers, giving them to trusted servants instead.[1631] In this manner, they avoided family bonds with states they wished to conquer and motivated the loyalty of their own men. In any case, the reality of the late Byzantine emperors not being able to keep their daughters close to home or select local brides for the heir to the throne was characteristic of the decline of the late Byzantine state.

Negotiations

With the exception of Empress Helene Palaiologina, the wife of John V, the sources do not explain the reasoning behind the selection of individual brides.[1632] Imperial legates apparently either gathered information on eligible ladies while traveling abroad on other assignments, or they travelled directly to pre-selected courts to probe possible alliances. In two cases, the source of information may have been a member of the imperial family: Theodore Palaiologos, the count of Montferrat and the son of Emperor Andronikos II, was well acquainted with the Italian courts. Since he visited Byzantium shortly before Andronikos II dispatched his legates to Savoy, it is possible that the empire owes its most famous Palaiologan empress, Anna of Savoy, to his recommendation. Additionally, as a distant relative of Anna's predecessor, Eirene Adelheid, he may have played a role in her selection as well.

Once a desirable bride had been located (and perhaps after some less formal diplomatic communications had taken place in order to prevent embarrassment),

1629 *Anna Komnene* I, 195 (VI, XII,4).
1630 For the fates of Palaiologan imperial princesses, see the bibliographical chapters.
1631 Dumas (2014).
1632 For an overview of the political aspect of the marriages of the late Byzantine empresses, see Dabrowska (1996), 15–47.

the emperor sent his ambassadors to the foreign court. In some cases, the legates travelled to more than one country in search of the most fitting match; such were the instructions of the emissaries of Andronikos II when seeking a bride for his heir, Michael IX.[1633] An embassy charged with bringing home a bride for the emperor was a state affair and required a proper welcome and suitable entertainment for the Byzantine diplomats, who were often received at the border by the foremost noblemen of the country they were visiting. The marriage negotiations usually lasted a month or more, during which time the parties not only concluded the match but also discussed related issues, such as mutual military aid, the dowry, arrival times, and transportation details for the princess and her entourage. The wishes of the prospective bride were not usually considered during the discussions, and she could not reject her suitor unless she was a widow. (The sources reveal that Anna-Constance of Hohenstaufen, the widow of John III Batatzes of Nicea, rejected the marriage proposal of Michael VIII.[1634] Similarly, Mara Branković, the widow of Sultan Murad II, successfully vetoed her parents' decision to marry her to Constantine XI[1635] in the final moments of the Byzantine Empire.)

The dowry certainly played an important role in the negotiations because in Byzantium (as in the medieval world in general) "a daughter was a status symbol and her dowry reflected her family's place in society."[1636] The dowry of a late Byzantine empress could consist of gold and silver as in the case of the plates brought to Byzantium by Maria-Rita of Armenia. Claims to property and titles were another possibility: Yolanda of Montferrat brought Andronikos II the claims of the counts of Montferrat to Thessalonike. Anna of Savoy, on the other hand, arrived in Constantinople with luxury household items. The sources rarely reveal what the emperors gave in exchange for their brides but do note that Andronikos II bound himself to send five hundred soldiers to bolster the army of his father-in-law. In return for the hand of their daughter, the family of the bride acquired the prestige of being the in-laws of the Byzantine emperor as well as the hope of seeing their grandson on the Byzantine throne.

The negotiating parties sometimes deliberated on confessional differences and, in the cases of Catholic women, had to consider applying for the approval of the pope. Nikephoros Gregoras noted that prior to sending Yolanda to Byzantium, her grandfather had failed to obtain papal consent.[1637] Similarly, the brother of Anna of Savoy incurred the displeasure of the Holy See for giving his half sister in marriage to a 'heretic.' Actually, the only late Byzantine empress to arrive in Byzantium with full papal permission was Sophia of Montferrat; however, it served her ill since it

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1633 For details, refer to the bibliographical chapter on Maria-Rita of Armenia.
1634 *Pachymeres* I, 245–249 (III,7). *Gregoras* I, 93 (IV,4).
1635 *Sphrantzes*, 112 (XXXI, 11). Popović (2010), 93.
1636 Angold (1989), 207.
1637 *Gregoras* I, 168 (VI,2).

hampered her integration into Byzantine society and partly played a role in her eventual return to Italy. Another of the tasks of the legates was to have tailors take the necessary measurements since the bride would be expected to don her imperial attire and purple shoes immediately upon arrival. Certainly it was of great importance for the bride to make a good first impression when she was presented to the people of her new home.

Once the two parties had reached an agreement, the legates returned to Byzantium to report to the emperor and commence preparations for the arrival of the bride. If the empress-to-be was to accompany them to the empire, as did Maria of Armenia, someone had to travel ahead of the rest of the party to apprise the emperor of the particulars concerning the bride's arrival. The *Vatican Epithalamion*,[1638] a richly illustrated book that describes an imperial marriage between the son of an emperor and a foreign princess, suggests that once marriage negotiations for the emperor's successor had been concluded, the imperial family made a jubilant wedding announcement to their subjects. The corresponding illumination captures the senior emperor, his young son, and the empress standing on an elevated platform while the herald publicly proclaims the forthcoming marriage.[1639] Although this text and illumination have traditionally been interpreted as depicting the arrival of the bride of Alexios II, Agnes of France, Cecily Hennessy has convincingly argued that the imperial bride is Maria of Bulgaria, destined to marry Andronikos IV Palaiologos.[1640]

The future empress was accompanied on her journey by servants, relatives, priests, and members of the nobility from the court of her father. Their role was to add glamour to her arrival and to look after her until she was married and crowned – or at least settled in the empire. They probably also delivered the dowry, presented the gifts their master had sent, and perhaps even exchanged important documents with imperial representatives. Due to financial constraints, the late Byzantine court could not be expected to provide for these guests indefinitely; therefore, except for a few trusted servants, the retinue usually remained only until the bride's coronation (as the ritual makes provision for two relatives of the empress to accompany her[1641]) – unless the ceremony was postponed, which sometimes occurred in the cases of very young brides or in the complex circumstances of a civil war. If the empress could not be crowned immediately, the entourage stayed to witness the wedding or, for a child bride like Anna of Moscow, remained at the court for only a short time before returning to their master.

1638 *Cod. Vaticanus* gr. 1851. For details on this text, see Strzygowski (1901). Papadimitriu (1902). Belting (1970), 26–29. Spatharakis (1976), 210–230, il. 158–173. Scholz (2003). Hilsdale (2005). Iacobini (1995). Jeffreys (1981).

1639 Hennessy (2006), 117, see also 120, fig. 3.

1640 Hennessy (2006).

1641 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 224 (VII).

Welcoming the bride[1642]

Although the sources offer relatively few details on individual events, it is clear that the appearance of an imperial bride in the Byzantine capital was an occasion marked by magnificent celebrations, rituals, and speeches.[1643] On her arrival, she was welcomed by her future husband and his father as well as other members of the imperial family, officials dressed in their festive robes, representatives of foreign merchants, and crowds of Constantinopolitan inhabitants – all of whom had come to see the new empress.

According to *Pseudo-Kodinos*, the location of this welcome depended on how the princess had reached the city:

> When an imperial bride arrives from abroad, either by land or by sea, the emperor, her husband and bridegroom, along with the emperor his father, if the latter is alive, meet her (. . .). If she arrives by land, it is customary that she dismounts at [the monastery of] Pege.[1644] If she arrives by ship, she comes ashore near the Blacherns church,[1645] outside the city, wherever it might be suitable (. . .) the emperor meets her on horseback along with the court title holders, near the Acropolis at the Eugenios Gate.[1646]

While the double location given for the disembarkation of the bride may seem confusing, the authors of the commentary and translation of the *Pseudo-Kodinos* text persuasively argued that the welcoming party, festively adorned and on horseback, 'met' the ship carrying the imperial bride as it emerged from the Marmara Sea (to the south) or the Bosphorus (to the east) by the Eugenios Gate, a representative spot well suited for such an occasion. The ship then sailed north along the Golden Horn, apparently accompanied by the welcoming party riding along the shore, to just north of the city where the disembarkation took place.[1647] For princesses arriving from the north (Rus or Bulgaria), it is not certain whether they sailed to the southern part of the Golden Horn or landed directly outside the northern city

1642 The reception of a bride is depicted in an illumination preserved in *Vaticanus* gr. 1851. For details, see *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 364 f., 435 ff. Dabrowska (1996), 87 ff. Malamut (2013A), 650 f. Malamut (2016A), 332–336. Jeffreys (1981). Scholz (2003).

1643 For further information on the speeches, see Jeffreys (1981), especially 109 f.

1644 Janin (1975), 223–228.

1645 Janin (1975), 161–171. Van Millingen (1899), 75–78. Efthymiadis (2006), 283–309.

1646 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 266 (XII), (trans.) 267. Magdalino lists three possible explanations for this discrepancy, including that these might be two different parts of one ceremony, with Palaiologan ceremonies grafted onto rituals dating from the time when the Great Palace (which had been the residence of the early Byzantine emperors in particular) was still in use, as well as the possibility that the author was describing two different practices, both of which were common in the late empire (Magdalino (2007), 11–13). Mango (2000), 178 f. Van Millingen (1899), 227. *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 435–437.

1647 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 437.

walls. While many late Byzantine brides arrived by sea, several came to the capital by land. Anna of Hungary[1648] as well as Eirene Kantakouzene and her daughter Helene (the bride of John V) traveled overland from the west, and the welcoming ceremony took place in the customary location by the Monastery of Theotokos tes Peges outside the land walls of Constantinople.[1649]

On landing or arriving at the Monastery of Pege, the bride was first greeted by the groom and also the senior emperor. Following this encounter, during which the future imperial couple were usually seeing one another for the first time, the emperors returned to the palace. Although it is reasonable to assume that Constantinopolitans of all backgrounds gathered on the coast to salute their new empress, *Pseudo-Kodinos* specifically mentions that "the most distinguished and noble wives of the dignitaries, senators, and other court title holders [came] in advance to the place of arrival (. . .) and received the imperial bride."[1650] From her first moments in the empire, the bride was thus surrounded by a group of Byzantine women, the wives of the imperial relatives and officials, who would later form the 'court' she presided over on festive and ceremonial occasions. The *Vatican Epithalamion* noted that seventy female members of the imperial family and wives of court officials were sent to welcome the bride, and one of them was charged with helping her change into her imperial attire.[1651]

After meeting the emperor(s) and perhaps listening to speeches of welcome presented by important scholars,[1652] the bride was greeted by the Byzantine princesses and noblewomen. Then, she entered a splendidly decorated tent, one that had apparently been prepared especially for the occasion. It was here that she changed her clothing with the help of the eminent lady who had been chosen for the task. *Pseudo-Kodinos* confirms the existence of this ritual, noting that "the emperors, or the emperor, retire and leave her [the young princess] there, while from among the mentioned wives of the court title holders, either *basilissai*, if there are any, or *sebastokratorissai* or the *kaisarissai*[1653] or the noblest among the others, put red shoes on her, there being prepared in advance imperial clothing. Sent forth in imperial fashion, she goes, escorted, on horseback to the palace."[1654] The illuminations in the Vatican *Epithalamion* include the depiction of a beautifully

1648 *Pachymeres* III, 413 (IV, 29).

1649 The official welcome of an imperial bride usually took place at this site. See also *ODB* I, 25 f.

1650 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 266 (XII), (trans.) 267.

1651 *Cod. Vaticanus* gr. 1851, fol. 3r. Hennessy (2006), 117, for the image, see *ibid.*, 122, fig. 5.

1652 Eustathios of Thessaloniki wrote such an oration to welcome Agnes of France on her arrival in Constantinople in the summer of 1179. For details, see *Eustathios of Thess.*, 252 ff. Stone (2003).

1653 These titles derive from the titles of the women's husbands.

1654 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 266 f. (XII). (Trans.) 267 f.

decorated tent, where the bride was properly shielded from the eyes of the waiting crowd. In the purple clothing that proclaimed her imperial status, she was presented to the people in a manner similar to the *prokypsis* ceremony mentioned earlier in the biography of Eirene Asenina Kantakouzene and could then enter the city as its mistress.[1655] This ceremonial change of clothing was symbolic in that it served to underline the transformation of a (foreign) princess or noblewoman into a Byzantine empress, the future mother of Byzantine emperors. In a similar way, the emperor arrived at the church on his coronation day wearing a simple robe. He then entered a changing area and emerged clothed in a black *sakkos*, the most solemn item of imperial attire. In the case of a foreign bride, an 'outsider,' the ceremony also foreshadowed her (expected) cultural metamorphosis.

The journey of the bride continued as she made her way to the palace, where she was probably met by the senior empress (who was also, in many cases, her future mother-in-law).[1656] This figure is conspicuously missing from the description in *Pseudo-Kodinos* of those gathered to welcome the bride on the seashore or outside the city walls. While the emperors welcomed the princess at the border of the city, the empress greeted her in its very heart, the imperial residence. Besides making the welcoming ceremony more elaborate, this custom may reflect the traditional attitude that noblewomen should lead a secluded existence. While the absence of the senior empress at the first welcoming ceremony was the rule, the sources do mention one notable exception: Anna of Savoy welcomed her future daughter-in-law, Helene Kantakouzene, along with the emperors at the Monastery of Theotokos tes Peges in the spring of 1347. While the reasons behind Anna's departure from tradition are not given, possible explanations include Anna's concern for the safety of her son or a simple desire to participate in the welcoming ceremonies as the bride, also in defiance of tradition, was not to move into the imperial residence before the wedding. It is equally possible that Anna, who had not been born in Byzantium, was not particularly concerned with the prescriptions of Byzantine court etiquette.

Proclamation[1657]

Describing the arrival of the same Helene, her father, John Kantakouzenos, mentions yet another ritual performed in the course of the welcoming ceremony:

> When they [Helene, her sister Maria and her mother Eirene] arrived at the shrine of the Mother of God before the city, where the spring is rightly called 'of the bountiful cures', the empress Anna came forth, accompanied by the emperors and all the illustrious officials. Helen then, who was soon to take up her abode with the young

1655 See also *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 321.
1656 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 436.
1657 On the proclamations of the emperors, see, for example, Dagron (2003), 54–83.

> emperor, as her father and the empress had arranged, was adorned with the imperial insignia and proclaimed empress of the Romans.[1658]

An official proclamation, declaring the imperial bride to be 'empress of the Romans,' was apparently part of the arrival ceremony and helped to establish the newcomer's position as a member of the imperial family in the minds of her subjects. The significance of this moment becomes evident in light of the following facts: first, proclamation was essential for the late Byzantine emperors as it allowed them to use the imperial title. John VI Kantakouzenos is known to have used the title emperor (*basileus*) from the time of his proclamation in 1341,[1659] five years before his first coronation took place in Adrianople. While coronation was certainly a glorious occasion, it did not create but rather confirmed and blessed the proclaimed emperor (and his wife). Even though only a crowned empress could use the titles '*augousta*' and '*autokratorissa*,' two imperial wives, Eirene-Adelheid and Anna of Moscow, were referred to in the sources by the imperial title '*despoina*' even though they had never been crowned. These examples indicate that proclamation, followed by marriage to the emperor, was of crucial importance for imperial brides.

Although an empress could be crowned twice, there were no multiple proclamations. This is illustrated by the case of Eirene Kantakouzene, who was first proclaimed empress in Didymoteichon on October 16, 1341. Her proclamation was not repeated on her arrival in Constantinople. As her husband was an eyewitness of her arrival and a historian most mindful of the proper observation of ritual, his silence on the matter can only signify that no such event took place, the reason being that Eirene had already been proclaimed empress. Actually, it was essential that the proclamation not be repeated; a second proclamation would have questioned the validity of the first as well as of Eirene's coronation in Adrianople in 1346.

While emperors of the Palaiologan period often faced protracted delays between their proclamations and their coronations,[1660] the two ceremonies were generally more closely spaced where the empresses were concerned. Andronikos II was first proclaimed emperor in 1265, but he was not crowned until 1272. His wife, Anna of Hungary, waited only a few months for her coronation. Michael IX, Andronikos's son, was proclaimed emperor in 1281, but his coronation did not take place until 1294. His wife, Maria-Rita of Armenia, received the crown just weeks after her proclamation in 1294. As representatives of a new dynasty on the Byzantine throne, the situations of Eirene Kantakouzene and Eirene Palaiologina were exceptional. Eirene Kantakouzene was proclaimed along with her husband in October 1341, but their first coronation did not take place until May 1346 after John had achieved considerable military success and had acquired a sufficient

1658 *Kantakouzenos* III, 11 (IV,1). (Trans.) *Miller, Kantakouzenos*, 150.
1659 On the importance of proclamation, see also *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 422 f.
1660 For a discussion of this phenomenon, see *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 421 f.

following among the nobility. Similarly, their son and his wife were proclaimed in 1353, but their coronation followed a year later after the election of a patriarch who was willing to perform the ceremony. The leisurely progression from an emperor's proclamation to his coronation reflects the fact that in late Byzantium, when power rested relatively securely in the hands of the Palaiologan dynasty, successors were proclaimed quickly in order to consolidate the position of the dynasty while coronation – as a final confirmation – was performed when the chosen ruler was mature and prepared to take on the responsibilities of his office. Empresses, on the other hand, usually assumed their role as adolescents or young adults. Combined with the fact that they generally wielded no direct authority, this meant that no waiting period was necessary.

Change of confession

Two further rituals generally awaited the non-native princess prior to the moment when she could enter the conventional venue for late Byzantine imperial weddings and coronations, Hagia Sophia, in her exquisite gown. Since the empress was expected to participate in the rituals of the Orthodox Church alongside her husband, women who had not been born into Orthodoxy (as was the case for most Palaiologan empresses) had to change their confession.[1661]

According to the 95th canon of the Quinisext Council (692), there were three degrees of separation from the universal Church. The first group consisted of serious heretics (Montanists, Manicheans, and the like) who were required to receive a new baptism before they could be accepted as Orthodox. The second group comprised the dissidents (e.g., Arians), who received an anointing with holy chrism upon returning to the fold. The members of the third group, the schismatics (non-Chalcedonians, for example, or Nestorians), were judged to be less separated from the Church and needed only to renounce their errors and profess the true faith in order to return to Orthodoxy.[1662] The religious 'errors' of the foreign, non-Orthodox empresses mostly fell into this last category; therefore, these women could take Orthodox husbands provided they were willing to convert to Orthodoxy:

> It is so that we admit their [Italian/Catholic] baptism and do not forbid legitimate marriages between the persons of our two nations on the natural condition that the Italian party converts to the very Christian state of our church and publicly proclaims that he [she] prefers them to the Italian customs.[1663]

The probable content of the ceremony in which the Palaiologan empresses commonly participated is briefly described by Symeon of Thessalonike in his

1661 Malamut (2013A), 654 f. On conversions of the Latins in fourteenth-century Byzantium, see Mitsiou (2018).

1662 For details, see Stavrou (2016), 208.

1663 *Dossier Lyons*, 139.

criticism of Sophia of Montferrat's decision to remain Catholic when he states that the princess who

> neither submitted to the Church nor became its daughter, nor publicly recognized the Church's hierarchs as her fathers, nor confessed the Symbol of Faith of the Fathers in the right form in which it was drawn up, was simply received and proclaimed Empress of the Orthodox together with the faithful Emperor in violation of the sacred canons.[1664]

According to Symeon's description, the conversion ritual included a public submission to the Orthodox Church and its representatives as well as a proclamation of the *Credo* in its Orthodox form. The *Syntagma* of Theodore Balsamon[1665] further claims that the Latins had to renounce their faith prior to their marriage.[1666] It is possible that the ritual of the laying on of hands was also performed.[1667]

Due to its significance, it is likely that the conversion ceremony took place in the presence of the patriarch as well as the clergy, who served as witnesses to (and could later attest to) the Orthodoxy of the empress. Unfortunately, the sources reveal nothing about the princesses' attire, nor do they mention the gifts that were exchanged on this occasion. The available information does raise some questions of a practical nature, however. In the course of the ritual, the empresses were supposed to recite the *Credo* in the Orthodox form. As foreigners (sometimes of tender years) who did not yet possess sufficient knowledge of the Greek language, the answer to the question of how they fulfilled this requirement remains unclear. Did an interpreter read the text for them (as has been suggested by Ekaterini Mitsiou[1668]) and they merely provided verification in the

1664 *Symeon of Thess.*, 147.

1665 *Syntagma* II, 253 f.

1666 For further details, see Troianos (1983), 92–101, and Schmalzbauer (1979), 219 f. Occasionally, Byzantine ladies also needed to change their confession. In the sixth century, Sophia, the wife of Justin II, converted from Monophysitism to Orthodoxy in order to strengthen her husband's chances of becoming emperor. (Justin was also a monophysite). For details, see Cameron (1963), 7.

1667 According to the synod of Constantinople of 1261, all Latins wishing to enter the Orthodox Church had to be chrismated (have the priest lay hands on them). For details, see Stavrou (2016), 211. Ekaterini Mitsiou also established further elements that may have been incorporated into the conversion ceremony: "condemnation of the Latin addition to the Creed that the Holy Spirit proceeds also from the Son (*filioque*), profession and acceptance of the Orthodox doctrine about the procession of the Holy Spirit, condemnation of the Latin practices and customs inconsistent with the tradition and rules of the Apostles and the Church Fathers." Mitsiou (2018), 312.

1668 Dr. Mitsiou, describing conversion to Orthodoxy as recorded in documents from the fourteenth century, points out the presence of an interpreter, who "may have played an important role in the procedure of conversion and the reading of the professio fidei." Mitsiou (2018), 312.

form of a written document or oral assent? Or did they repeat the *Credo* phrase by phrase as it was recited to them by the officiating cleric?

Exceptionally, the conversion ritual could take place during the princess's journey to Constantinople. When Maria-Rita fell seriously ill on her way to Byzantium, she and her attendants made an emergency landing on Rhodes. There, the princess recanted the teachings of the Armenian Church (since it was perceived by the Byzantines as heretical)[1669] and converted to Orthodoxy. She then received an anointing and a blessing,[1670] apparently from the Byzantine priests who were part of her retinue. As was noted earlier, only Sophia of Montferrat refused to change her confession and convert to Orthodoxy.[1671]

Change of name

During their baptisms as infants, several empresses of foreign origin received names that were difficult for the Byzantine tongue to pronounce or that sounded strange to the Byzantine ear.[1672] In such cases, a new name became part of the external assimilation of the non-native princess, turning the Armenian Rita into Empress Maria and both the German Adelheid and the Italian Yolanda into Empress Eirene.[1673] Sophia of Montferrat, on the other hand, was able to keep her name since 'Sophia' appears in the Orthodox calendar (and had also been the name of the eminent sixth-century consort of Justin II).[1674] Alexander Kazhdan noted a certain prominence of 'Eirene' (peace) among the names assumed by foreign-born princesses.[1675] Exactly how many of the late Byzantine imperial brides were renamed on their arrival in the empire is difficult to determine, however, since the original names of some of them (such as Anna of Hungary or Anna of Moscow) remain unknown.

Wedding the emperor (-to-be)[1676]

As the role of the empress was closely associated with that of the emperor (except for the few cases in which the empress herself ruled the empire), the wedding

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1669 *Athanasios*, 342.
1670 *Pachymeres* III, 229–233.
1671 For details, see the chapter on Sophia of Montferrat.
1672 See, for example, Dabrowska (1996), 91.
1673 The custom of renaming empresses can also be seen in Trebizond. A Georgian princess, allegedly named Gülhan Hatun, was renamed Eudokia prior to her coronation. See *Lampsides, Panaretos*, 78.
1674 According to Gudrun Schmalzbauer (Schmalzbauer (1979), 220) „wenn eine Ausländerin nicht umbennant wurde, dann geschah dies nicht, weil sie bereits einen Namen hatte, den irgendeine byzantinische Vorgängerin getragen hatte, sondern weil er im Festkalender vorkam."
1675 Kazhdan (1992), 11.
1676 See also Malamut (2016A), 336–342. Leszka–Leszka (2017), 67 ff.

was a crucial step in the journey toward the imperial title. Upon being proclaimed empress, each aspirant had already been invested with the symbols of imperial power; however, wedding the heir to the throne was still necessary to confirm her position. The cases of Eirene-Adelheid and Anna of Moscow, neither of whom was ever crowned, testify that proclamation and marriage sufficed to create an empress.

The venue for imperial weddings changed over time. Up until the tenth century, Byzantine empresses were married in St. Stephen's Chapel in the Daphne Palace,[1677] and from the tenth century, they made their vows in the Theotokos of the Pharos in the southern part of the Great Palace.[1678] It was only relatively late in the history of the empire that Hagia Sophia, built in the mid-sixth century, became the preferred wedding and coronation site of the Byzantine emperors and empresses, a role it played until the Ottoman conquest. According to the eleventh-century work *De cerimoniis*, the imperial couple were married in St. Stephen's. They left the chapel while the patriarch celebrated the liturgy and then returned to receive the wedding crowns. A reception followed.[1679]

The wedding ceremonies of the late Byzantine rulers are not described in detail in the sources, suggesting that they followed the traditional pattern:[1680] in the morning, the bride performed ritual ablutions;[1681] then, dressed in white and wearing a veil, she proceeded to the church where the ceremony began with the liturgical procession. The marriage rite itself consisted of the betrothal, during which the couple expressed their consent to the union, followed by the conferral of the wedding crowns.[1682] The senior emperor or empress may have held these crowns for the bride and groom. The historian George Pachymeres mentioned that Theodora Palaiologina performed this act at the wedding of her son Andronikos II and his second wife, Eirene-Yolanda.[1683] Prayers, reading(s), and litanies were interwoven throughout the ceremony.[1684] Finally, the couple removed their crowns and accepted a final blessing from the patriarch before the ceremony concluded with the liturgical recession.

1677 *De cerimoniis*, 196 (I,39). For an interesting study on the church and its role in the symbolism and rituals of the empire, see Kalavrezou (1997), especially 57–61. Dagron (2003), 71.

1678 *De cerimoniis*, 201 (I,39). On the church and its ritual role, see Kalavrezou (1997), especially 55 ff.

1679 For details, see *De cerimoniis*, 212 ff. (I,41).

1680 For details on the marriage ceremonies, see *ODB* II, 1304 f., 1306 f., III, 2193 f. Angold (1989).

1681 Treitinger (1956), 110 f.

1682 *ODB* II, 1306.

1683 *Pachymeres* III, 101 (VII,33).

1684 *Stoudios, Epistles*, I, 22, *To Symeon the Monk*, col. 973CD; I, 31, *To the Monks of Sakkoudion*, 1012D. For a translation, see Meyendorff (1990), 105, see also fn. 50.

De cerimoniis preserves a record of the acclamations with which middle Byzantine crowds (prompted by precentors) greeted the *augousta* after her marriage:

> 'Let us dutifully cheer the *augousta*, our joy.' The cheerleaders: 'Many years for you, God-appointed *augousta*!' The people three times: 'Many years for you!' The cheerleaders: 'Many years for you, most fortunate *augousta*!' (. . .) The cheerleaders: 'Many years for you, the wife of the ruler!' (. . .) The cheerleaders: 'You have been chosen by divine election.' (. . .) The cheerleaders: 'God, the ruler over all, has blessed you.' (. . .) The cheerleaders: 'You have been married in purple by God. . .' (. . .) The cheerleaders: 'Having given you the nuptial crown with his own hand.' (. . .) The cheerleaders: 'Now having called you to this title. . .' (. . .) The cheerleaders: 'And having married you to so-and-so, the ruler. . .' (. . .) The cheerleaders: 'May he multiply your years with the ruler! (. . .) The cheerleaders: 'May God listen to your people.' (. . .) The cheerleaders: 'Many years for so-and-so, the most pious *augousta*!' The people: [May God make your holy reign] long-lasting!'[1685]

Unfortunately, there is no record of acclamation focused exclusively on the empress in the Palaiologan period. In late Byzantium, the empress was usually acclaimed together with her husband as was described in some of the biographical chapters.

After the ceremony at the church, the newlyweds returned to the palace, where they once again showed themselves to the people.[1686] In their comments on the new edition and translation of *Pseudo-Kodinos*, the authors express the opinion that, from the thirteenth century at the latest, imperial brides (and not only the daughters of emperors) performed a ritual known as *prokypsis*[1687] on their wedding day. On most occasions, such as dominical feasts, it was the emperor and sometimes his heir who showed themselves to the gathered crowds; however, on the occasion of an imperial wedding, the stage was granted to the new wife of the ruler. *Pseudo-Kodinos*, very selective about the ceremonies he mentions, has

The prayers may have included one quoted by John Meyendorff from the eighth and ninth century: "O Lord stretch Thy hand from Thy holy dwelling place, and unite Thy servant and Thy handmaid: unite them in one mind; crown them into one flesh, since Thou has blessed them to be wed to each other; make their marriage to be honorable; preserve their bed blameless mercifully grant that they may live together in purity."

1685 *De cerimoniis*, 200 f. (I,39). (Trans.) *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 200 f.

1686 Malamut (2013A), 648.

1687 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 405 f. *A prokypsis* was apparently the stage on which the ceremony took place. For further details, see *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 401–411, for the wedding *prokypsis*, see 405 f. For the *prokypsis* of the emperors, see Treitinger (1956), 113. The first known *prokypsis* of this kind is described by Nicholas Eirenikos in his depiction of the wedding of Anna-Constance von Hohenstaufen and John III Batatzes, the emperor of Nicea. See also Malamut (2013A), 648. Jeffreys (1987).

nothing to say about such a ritual, but John Kantakouzenos described a *prokypsis* in his *Memoirs* as it had been performed at the wedding of his daughter Theodora:

> The emperor ordered that a *prokypsis* be made of wood in front of the city, on the plain, so that the betrothed daughter of the emperor might stand on it and become visible to all. It is the custom of emperors to do this for their daughters who are getting married (. . .). The next day, Theodora, the one to be wed, went up on the *prokypsis*, while the emperor alone was on horseback. All the others were on foot. When the curtains were opened – for the *prokypsis* was covered on all sides with gold silk fabric – the bride appeared. Large candles were lit on either side of her. Eunuchs held these, kneeling, so that they did not appear. Trumpets sounded to the greatest extent and pipes and wind instruments and all that has been invented for people's pleasure. When these ceased to play, singers sang encomia written by certain learned men.[1688]

De cerimoniis does not mention the wedding ceremony itself but does describe the movements of the newlyweds as they passed through the Great Palace, wearing their nuptial crowns and being acclaimed by various dignitaries and circus factions. Afterwards, they entered the bridal chamber, put aside both their marriage and imperial crowns, and proceeded to the banquet.[1689] After they had partaken of the meal that had been prepared for them, they retired to the wedding chamber, where the bride may have received a marriage belt.[1690] The wedding feast, which usually had the character of a public celebration, continued for several days or even weeks. The young couple entertained their guests at receptions where the courtiers ate in the presence of the emperor and empress, who were seated at a separate table.[1691]

On her wedding day, the bride was celebrated in nuptial poetry (*epithalamia*), which described the beauty of both husband and wife and celebrated their individual significance as well as the (political) advantages of their union. One such *epithalamion* was composed by Nicholas Eirenikos, the patriarchal *chartophylax*, on the occasion of the marriage of John III Batatzes and Anna-Constance of Hohenstaufen in 1244. The following excerpt reveals the nature of these compositions:

> Around the lovely cypress-tree, the ivy gently windeth,
> the empress is the cypress-tree, my emperor is the ivy.
> Here in the world's wide garden-ground, he reaches from the centre,
> his tendrils softly compassing the plenteous trees and herbage.
> And holds them flourishing and fair, and crowns them with his glory,
> the trees he grasps are cities great and lands and peoples many.
> Around the lovely cypress tree, the ivy gently windeth,
> the empress is the cypress-tree, my emperor is the ivy.[1692]

1688 *Kantakouzenos* II, 586 ff. (III,95). (Trans.) *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 406.
1689 *De cerimoniis*, 197 ff. (I,39).
1690 *ODB* II, 1305 f. Dawson (2006), 56.
1691 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 240 (VII), 241 (see fn. 707).
1692 Heisenberg (1920), 101, ls. 28–33. (Trans.) Savvides (1988), 105.

Coronation[1693]

The coronation ritual officially sealed the transformation from princess to empress as "a symbol by which accession to power [could] be identified by the viewer."[1694] In earlier centuries, coronations often took place on major feast days, such as Christmas, Epiphany, Easter or Pentecost;[1695] however, in late Byzantium, scheduling the coronation of an empress to coincide with an occasion of religious significance was clearly of secondary importance. On the other hand, coronation and marriage were closely connected; in all known cases, Palaiologan empresses were crowned only after their weddings had been celebrated (a divergence from the customs of the middle period).[1696]

A comparison of the coronations of the early Byzantine empresses as described by Constantine VII in his *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae* with the treatise of *Pseudo-Kodinos* clearly shows that the ceremony evolved gradually, adjusting itself to the situation and customs of the late Byzantine court. According to *De cerimoniis*, the coronations of ninth-century empresses were performed in the Augusteus Hall.[1697] In the Palaiologan period, these ceremonies took place in

1693 As the literature connected with coronation in Byzantium is extensive, I have included only a few selected studies: Sickel (1898). Ostrogorsky–Stein (1932) (describes the circumstances of the coronations of some of the early and middle Byzantine empresses). Charanis (1940–1941A) (stresses the importance of the participation of the patriarch and the religious aspect of coronation). Tsirpanlis (1972). For the title Augusta and her coronation, see *ibid.*, 521. Dabrowska (1996), 89 f. For further literature, see the footnotes below. Malamut (2013A), 651–654. For the middle Byzantine period, see also Malamut (2016A), 336–342. For a detailed description of the emperor's movements and actions in Hagia Sophia on festive occasions (including coronation), see Majeska (1997), for coronation, see 2 ff. For a detailed description of the proclamation and coronation of the emperors, see Dagron (2003), 54–83, 279 f. Leszka–Leszka (2017), 64–67.

1694 Hill–James–Smythe (1994), 222.

1695 Mc Cormick (1985), 12. Kalavrezou (1997), 75.

1696 The same observation was made by Maslev (Maslev (1966), 309 f.) Barbara Hill notes that, in the middle Byzantine period, an empress could be crowned prior to her marriage to the emperor (Hill (1999), 103). "On the third of the same month of November the patriarch went to the church of the Pharos in the palace, and the betrothal of the emperor Leo to the same Irene was celebrated. On 17 December Irene was crowned empress in the hall of Augusteus. She proceeded to the chapel of St. Stephen in the Daphne and received the marital crown along with Constantine's son Leo." *Theophanes*, AM 6261, (ed. de Boor) I, 444. *Mango, Theophanes*, 613.

1697 *De cerimoniis*, chap. 41, 208–216. See also Herrin (2001), 60. In the course of the early Byzantine ceremonies, the patriarch pronounced two prayers over the newly crowned empress, which were the same as the ones he pronounced over the crowned emperors (εἰσάγεται ἡ βασίλισσα παρὰ τῶν πραιποσίτων (. . .) ἐπεύχεται ὁ πατριάρχης τὴν εὐχὴν ἣν ποεῖ ἐπὶ τῶν βασιλέων, ἐναλάσσων μόνον τὰ ῥήματα πρὸς γυναῖκα.) Arranz (1990), 99, ls. 21, 25 f. For the prayers, see *ibid.*, 93, 97.

Hagia Sophia[1698] or, when necessary, in the Church of Theotokos Blachernitissa, highlighting the strong connection between the late Byzantine imperium and the Orthodox Church.[1699]

The history of the coronation ritual reaches back to AD 400 when Eudoxia, the wife of Arcadius, was crowned '*augousta*.' While an emperor of that period could also designate a daughter (or any other eligible female relative) '*augousta*,' late Byzantine empresses received the title at their coronations. Additionally, the sources do not indicate that the title was conferred on anyone other than the consort of the emperor during the Palaiologan period.

A brief summary of the coronation of the *augousta* as described in *De cerimoniis* is necessary to assist the reader in understanding the ceremony as it was eventually celebrated in the Palaiologan era. According to this ceremonial book of the middle period, the most important officials and members of the imperial court gathered in the Chapel of St. Stephen together with the patriarch. The latter then met the emperor(s) in the Hall of the Augousteus, accompanied by patrician women who had been selected beforehand by the emperor to be present at the coronation of the empress.[1700] The members of the *kouboukleion* brought in the lady about to be crowned (*augousta*), and the emperors, the patriarch, and the *augousta* took their places near a portable altar. The patriarch said the customary prayers over the imperial *chlamys*, and when he had finished, the rulers exchanged the veil of the *augousta* for the *chlamys*, fastening it with their own hands. The patriarch then prayed over the imperial crown and handed it to the emperor, who placed it on the head of the *augousta*.[1701] The emperor and the *augousta* followed the patriarch to the Church of St. Stephen and sat in the places that had been prepared for them. The patriarch took his leave, and the emperor and empress received the dignitaries of the imperial court, who prostrated themselves before their sovereigns and kissed their knees. After this gesture, they wished them a long reign and departed. Next, the eleven groups of the female members of the imperial court entered, headed by the girdled patrician women. Each group bowed to the emperor and the empress and left. The empress then moved through the premises of the Great Palace, followed by the women who had just paid their respects to her, and revealed her face to the hippodrome factions gathered at the terrace of the tribunal while accepting their acclamations.[1702] Then, as the people cheered, she lit candles in front of a cross, bowed to the crowds, and returned through

1698 On the transition, see Dagron (2003), 84–124.

1699 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 416. Professor Anastos claims that the ecclesiastical aspect of the coronation was not essential (for details, see Anastos (1993).

1700 *De cerimoniis*, 214 (I,41).

1701 *De cerimoniis*, 202 f. (I,40). (Trans.) *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 202 f. For further information on the role of the emperor and the patriarch in the coronation ceremony, see Dagron (2003), 76.

1702 For the acclamations, see *De cerimoniis*, 205 f. (I,40). (Trans.) *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 205 f.

the Hall of the Augousteus.[1703] Following the coronation and the acclamations of her subjects, the *augousta* moved through the spacious halls of the palace in her imperial finery, wearing her resplendent crown. Afterwards, the imperial wedding could take place.[1704]

Several Palaiologan sources[1705] describe the coronation of an empress, including the treatise of *Pseudo-Kodinos*, the account of the coronation of Manuel II and Helene Dragaš (preserved in the work of the fourteenth-century Russian monk Ignatios of Smolensk),[1706] John Kantakouzenos's description of his own coronation as well as that of Andronikos III[1707] in his *Memoirs*, and the description of the coronation of John VI included in the work of Nikephoros Gregoras. To prevent unnecessary repetition, the following reconstruction of the coronation of a Palaiologan empress takes into account all of these sources.

Typically, the coronations of the Palaiologan empresses were part of the more elaborate coronation ceremonies of the emperors. The empress may have changed in the robing room situated in the gallery mentioned by *De cerimoniis*[1708], or she may have arrived fully dressed and proceeded directly to the imperial box, where she normally sat during church ceremonies.[1709] It was there that she waited for the emperor, who first entered a structure that had been specially erected for his use to change into the festive, black *sakkos*. Once he emerged, the empress descended from the gallery, dressed (most probably) in a purple robe, a *divitision* embroidered in gold, and a *loros* decorated with precious stones. On her head she wore a *stephanos*.[1710] Together, the imperial couple walked to the podium, which was

1703 For further details on the wedding and coronation ceremonies of the empress, see *De cerimoniis*, 207–216 (I,24). (Trans.) *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 139.

1704 *De cerimoniis*, 212 f. (I,41). (Trans.) *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 212 f.

1705 For further details on imperial coronations, see *Pachymeres* III, 219–221 (IX,1) (concerns the coronation of Michael IX).

1706 *Majeska, Travellers.*

1707 *Kantakouzenos* I, 196–203 (I,41), for the coronation of the empress, see especially 199.

1708 *De cerimoniis*, 67 ff. (I,9).

1709 In his commentary on the report of Ignatios of Smolensk, George Majeska noted: "Judging from the Ignatian description of the coronation of Manuel II, however, it seems likely that she, like the emperor, was in the galleries of the church, probably in the imperial box of the *gynaeceum*, her customary place during services in the Great Church, and descended to the narthex, where she was met by her husband and conducted by him to their thrones on the dais on the south side of the nave. There, contrary to the usual custom of the Orthodox Church, they were seated, as Ignatius notes, rising at the most solemn moments in the service." *Majeska, Travellers*, 426.

1710 *Kantakouzenos* I, 196 ff. (I,41). *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 220 (VII). The text does not offer any details on the appearance of the *stephanos* (also called the *stemmatogyrion*) worn by the empresses but describes the *stephanos* worn by other dignitaries as being embellished with pearls and precious stones with small arches either on four sides (the *stephanos* of the despot, the son of the emperor) or in the front only (the

covered with red silk, and were seated on high, golden thrones.[1711] The next active role for the empress was during her coronation. After the patriarch (and the senior emperor, if present) had crowned the emperor at the ambo, the emperor descended to the *solea* (a podium between the ambo and the altar area) and crowned his wife:

> If he [the emperor] has a wife, she must also be crowned. She therefore rises from her throne and two of her close relatives or, if she has none, two eunuchs take her and carry her from the stairs and bring her to the *solea*. The emperor then takes the crown[1712] prepared for her from the hands of the relatives or eunuchs and places it on the head of his wife. She bows before her husband and emperor and promises him obedience. The patriarch, who in the meantime also comes to the *solea* prays for the emperor, empress and their subjects. In this manner, the emperor crowns his wife.[1713]

While the early and middle Byzantine empresses who legitimized the position of their husbands could also crown them (e.g., Zoe the Macedonian, who placed the stemma on the head of her husband Michael IV), late Byzantine empresses received the crown from their husbands. This was both because the latter, as the male partners, represented communication with Christ[1714] and because it was the emperors, as blood members of the imperial dynasty, who legitimized the position of their wives in the Palaiologan period. In addition to the crown, the patriarch presented the emperor with a cross. The emperor, in turn, bestowed upon his wife a gold scepter known as a *baion*, which resembled a palm branch and was decorated with precious gems and pearls.[1715] Before returning to their thrones, the imperial couple prostrated themselves in front of the sanctuary.[1716]

The sources indicate that senior empresses in all their finery were also present during the coronations of their successors and were seated on thrones on

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stephanos worn by a despot who is not a son of the emperor or by the *sebastokrator* or *caesar*). See also *ODB* III, 1952. Based on these descriptions, we may assume that the *stephanos* of the late Byzantine empresses was a less elaborate form of crown, possibly resembling a diadem.

1711 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 218 (VII). *Majeska, Travellers*, 109. *Kantakouzenos* I, 197 (I,41). Kantakouzenos noted that there were four or five steps leading up to the throne.

1712 For an interesting study on late Byzantine crown jewels, see Hetherington (2003).

1713 *Kantakouzenos* I, 199 (I,41). The description of the coronation of the empress provided by *Pseudo-Kodinos* is very similar to the account of Kantakouzenos. For details, see *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 224 (VII). Ignatios of Smolensk mostly confirms this information. For details, see *Majeska, Travellers*, 109 f.

1714 Barbara Hill explains that "the emperor crowned the *augousta* because her authority derived from him, not directly from God as that of the emperor did." Hill (1999), 103.

1715 For further details, see *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 223 (fn. 648).

1716 This information is preserved in the anonymous protocol of *Laurentianus* VIII, 17, which described the coronation of Manuel II. For the edited text, see *Verpeaux, Pseudo-Kodinos*, 355.

the imperial podium along with the young emperor and his wife; however, there is no reference to their having any special role in the ceremony. *Pseudo-Kodinos* states that

> the previously crowned mother of the new emperor stands wearing a crown and holding in her hand a gold *baion* which has pearls and gems embedded around it, from the top down a span in length. She does this if her husband, that is the father of the new emperor, is alive. If she should happen to be a widow, she holds the *baion* both when she is standing and when she is sitting, and she wears a black garment which is called a *himation* and a violet mantle.[1717]

Following the coronation of the empress, the elaborate liturgy continued. Ignatios of Smolensk, an eyewitness of the coronation of Helene Dragaš, describes one aspect of the coronation ritual that *Pseudo-Kodinos* does not mention:

> When it was time for holy communion, the two chief deacons went and bowed to the empress. (...) The empress entered a wing of the sanctuary by the south doors and was given holy communion there.[1718] The emperor, however, received communion from the patriarch at the altar of Christ together with the priests.[1719]

To conclude the ceremony, the newly crowned emperor and empress, joined by the senior imperial couple[1720] (if present), rose and walked to the southern gallery. There they were seated on smaller thrones behind a golden curtain, which was then raised as the singers intoned, 'Rise, rise.' After the imperial couple had shown themselves to the people and received their acclamation,[1721] the ecclesiastical ceremony was considered complete. The emperor and empress then left the church as small sachets of coins (*epikombia*)[1722] were distributed to the people. After the coronation of Manuel II, the imperial treasury could no longer support this custom, so later emperors and empresses were showered with small coins known as *staurata* instead.[1723]

On leaving the church, the imperial couple mounted specially adorned horses led by the most important members of the imperial family (*despots*, *sebastokrators,* and *kaisars*) and rode[1724] to the nearby Great Palace while the rest of the assembly

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1717 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 222 ff. (VII).
1718 In his comments on the communion of the empress, George Majeska notes: "Very likely, however, the empress was given communion not in the south wing of the sanctuary, as Ignatius suggested, but rather at the chancel door of the barrier which opened onto the *metatorion*, the imperial oratory at the southeast corner of the church." *Majeska, Travellers*, 432. See also Taft (1998), 71.
1719 *Majeska, Travellers*, 111, (trans.) 110.
1720 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 234 (VII).
1721 This coin was marked with the shape of the cross. *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 234 (VII).
1722 Small sachets with three gold, three silver, and three copper coins. *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 239 (VII). *Kantakouzenos* I, 203 (I,41).
1723 *Majeska, Travellers*, 113, 435.
1724 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 236 (VII), for details, see 237 (fn. 691).

followed on foot. On their arrival, the couple changed their clothes[1725] (keeping their crowns) and entered the banquet hall. There, they were seated at a special table and proceeded to eat the meal that had been prepared for them, which was served by the *megas domestikos* while the members of the court stood watching.[1726] The purpose of this rather peculiar reception was to emphasize the sublime nature of the imperial couple, who stood high above not only the members of the court but also the members of their own family, excepting the senior imperial couple, who, if present, shared the table with them.[1727] When the meal was finished, all relatives and court officials prostrated themselves before the imperial couple and took their leave.[1728] Later, more *epikombia* were given to the people.[1729]

The following day, the imperial couple returned to the Blacherns Palace, where the festivities continued for another ten days or so, depending on the wishes of the emperor.[1730] Before entering the palace, they showed themselves to their people from a high tribune;[1731] afterward, *epikombia* were again distributed to the crowds that had gathered.[1732] During the celebrations, the emperor and empress in their splendid attire feasted and entertained their court officials;[1733] however, they always sat at a table of their own although the members of the court ate with them in the same room. They were waited on by the *domestikos tes trapezes* and *epi tes trapezes*,[1734] who served the food on plates of gold and silver.[1735]

Of all the rituals performed for and by the late Byzantine imperial brides, it is the coronation that clearly highlights the unequal status of emperor and empress. The complexity of the emperor's ceremony[1736] allowed for an acknowledgement of his authority as the leader of the army and the protector of his people (the raising on the shield); his spiritual position as the anointed of Christ,[1737] who had access to

1725 *Verpeaux, Pseudo-Kodinos*, 360.
1726 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 236 (VII), 237 (fn. 692 f.).
1727 *Kantakouzenos* III, 29 (IV,4).
1728 *Verpeaux, Pseudo-Kodinos*, 360.
1729 *Kantakouzenos* I, 203 (I,41).
1730 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 414 f. *Verpeaux, Pseudo-Kodinos*, 361.
1731 *Gregoras* II, 788 (XV,11). For details on this ceremony following the coronation of Manuel II and Helene Dragaš, see the appendix in *Verpeaux, Pseudo-Kodinos*, 360.
1732 While *Pseudo-Kodinos* mentions that this display of imperial generosity followed the return of the imperial couple to the Blacherns Palace, another Byzantine historian, George Pachymeres, mentions this ritual in connection with the crowned emperor's (in this case Michael IX's) passage from Hagia Sophia to the Great Palace. *Pachymeres* III, 221 (IX,1). Based on Kantakouzenos's (*Kantakouzenos* I, 203 (I,41)) account, it seems that the *epikombia* were (at least sometimes) thrown on both occasions.
1733 *Kantakouzenos* I, 203 f. (I,41).
1734 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 240, for details on dining, see 241, fn. 703.
1735 Compare with *Gregoras* II, 788 f. (XV,11).
1736 For details on the coronation of the emperor, see *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 210–244 (VII).
1737 For details, see Dölger (1938), 25. Sickel (1898), 550, fn. 84.

the inner area of the sanctuary on festive occasions; and his ascendancy as ruler, the bearer of the imperial crown. By contrast, the empress received her crown not from the hands of the patriarch (and senior emperor) but from the hands of her husband. This act did not predate the wedding as in earlier periods (which would make the empress more of an equal partner to her fiancé) but followed it. Moreover, her very first duty as empress was to perform the *proskynesis* in front of the emperor and promise him obedience. Furthermore, the empress's coronation did not take place as a separate ceremony during this period but was part of either the emperor's coronation or the imperial wedding. (There was only one exception in late Byzantium: Eirene-Yolanda received the crown in a separate ceremony after giving birth to her eldest son, John.) The empress received no anointing, nor could she enter the inner sanctuary like her husband. Her inferior status was further expressed visually: while the emperor was crowned at the elevated ambo, the empress was crowned below the ambo on the *solea*. This ritual subordination of the empress in the late empire contrasts strongly with the position of earlier empresses, who repeatedly crowned new emperors. Faced with the overwhelming symbolism of the empress's subjection to her husband, it is quite difficult to connect late Byzantium with the powerful realm where Empress Pulcheria once crowned her husband Marcian or Empress Verina crowned her brother Basiliskos or Empress Ariadne crowned her second husband, Anastasios, or Zoe the Macedonian placed crowns on the heads of her second husband, Michael IV, and her adopted son, Michael V.[1738] The ritual subjection of the empress may simply have been the result of evolving ritual practice but may also have been connected to the fact that imperial legitimacy was carried exclusively by emperors throughout the Palaiologan period.

Concerning the individual coronations of the late Byzantine empresses, there were several possible scenarios, the most basic of which involved the emperor and empress being crowned together. This was the case for almost half of the ruling couples, including Michael Palaiologos and Theodora (at least in the course of their coronation in Nymphaion), Andronikos II and Anna of Hungary, and Matthew Kantakouzenos[1739] and Eirene Palaiologina.

A second scenario involved an emperor who had received the crown prior to his wedding. According to *Pseudo-Kodinos*, "If it should happen that the emperor is crowned already, the empress is crowned by her own husband, the emperor, in a similar fashion when he celebrates the wedding ritual, taking her as his wife."[1740] Kantakouzenos adds that "on such an occasion they both also stand on a tribune and sit on the thrones during the celebration of the liturgy."[1741] This was the case

1738 See Garland (1999), 3.

1739 For a reference to Matthew's coronation, see *Gregoras* III, 204 (XXVIII,43).

1740 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 226 (VII).

1741 *Kantakouzenos* I, 199 (I,41). The description of the coronation of the empress provided by *Pseudo-Kodinos* is very similar to the account of John Kantakouzenos. For

for five imperial couples, including Michael IX[1742] and Maria-Rita of Armenia, John V and Helene Kantakouzene, and John VIII and Maria of Trebizond. Andronikos II and his second wife, Eirene-Yolanda, can be considered a special situation within this category for the reason mentioned earlier.[1743]

The third scenario involved an imperial couple being crowned twice.[1744] Only John VI Kantakouzenos and his wife, Eirene Kantakouzene, who received the crown in Adrianople[1745] on May 21, 1346, and in Constantinople a year later, can be said with certainty to belong to this category.[1746] Whether Theodora Palaiologina was also crowned on two different occasions, in Nymphaion in 1259[1747] and then in Constantinople in the fall of 1261, remains unclear.[1748] Double coronations were unusual and were directly connected with issues of legitimacy. While it was theoretically possible for a Byzantine emperor from a well-established dynasty to be crowned anywhere (Constantine XI was crowned in Mistra), coronation in Constantinople was of special importance if an emperor sought to found a new dynasty and/or prove the legitimacy of his reign. This was the case for both Michael VIII Palaiologos and John VI Kantakouzenos, who wished to challenge the accusation that their ascent to power had been a mere usurpation and so decided to confirm their legitimacy by a second coronation in the traditional location.

A fourth circumstance, seen in only two cases in late Byzantium, involved an empress who was never crowned. The fact that coronation was not absolutely necessary for acquiring imperial prerogatives has already been mentioned; nevertheless, such situations were highly unusual. Furthermore, both Eirene-Adelheid and Anna of Moscow would have been crowned had they lived long enough: Eirene-Adelheid's coronation was postponed because of the civil war, and Anna's coronation had to wait until she and her husband had obtained the years and experience necessary to assume their official duties.

As for the time that could elapse between a wedding and a coronation ceremony, both could be accomplished in the course of day (which seems to have been the case for John VIII and his second wife, Sophia of Montferrat) or two (Manuel II and Helene Dragaš). In some cases, however, a substantial length of time elapsed

details, see *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 224 (VII). Ignatios of Smolensk mostly confirms this information. For details, see *Majeska, Travellers*, 109 f.

1742 For details on Michael's coronation, see *Pachymeres* III, 219, 221(IX,1).

1743 *PLP*, n. 21475.

1744 For reflections on second coronations, see *Majeska, Travellers*, 417 f.

1745 *Kantakouzenos* II, 254 (III,41).

1746 *Gregoras* II, 788 (XV,11).

1747 *Pachymeres* I, 143–147 (II,8). For further sources, see *ibid.*, 142, fn 2. For a precise chronology and discussion of the events, see Wirth (1961), 91. For details and literature, see the chapter on Theodora Palaiologina.

1748 *Pachymeres* I, 233 (III,2). In his writings concerning the relationship of Michael VIII with the West, Geanakoplos indicates that Theodora was crowned along with her husband (Geanakoplos (1959), 121).

between the two ceremonies. Andronikos II and Anna of Hungary were married in the spring or summer of 1272, but their coronation did not take place until November of the same year.[1749] Andronikos IV and Maria of Bulgaria had to wait much longer; they were married in 1356 but were not crowned until twenty years later – in August 1376.[1750]

Preserved coins, seals, and several images all bear witness to the coronation insignia of an empress: a tall, pointed crown decorated with hanging pendants (*pendilia*) and a branching, gem-encrusted scepter (*baion*).[1751] The fact that the senior empress also wore a crown and held a scepter during the coronation of her younger counterpart suggests that there were no specific coronation jewels in Byzantium but that a unique set of jewels was prepared for each empress. This multiplicity of crowns and scepters would appear to confirm the theory proposed by Hetherington[1752] that, unlike in the West, where a particular crown was often the only legitimate coronation jewel for bestowing the royal or imperial title (e.g., the Crown of St. Stephen in Hungary or the St. Wenceslas Crown of the Czech kings in Bohemia), the identity of the jewels did not play a significant role in Byzantium. This theory is further supported by the fact that the legitimacy of the coronation of John VI and his wife, who were crowned with regalia of gilded leather decorated with glass imitations of gems (as Gregoras so scathingly observed),[1753] was never questioned. Furthermore, multiple empresses frequently presided over the imperial court(s) simultaneously, necessitating a set of appropriate regalia for each. (The first two empresses who found themselves in need of a crown at the same time were Theodora Palaiologina and Anna of Hungary. Around the year 1354, there were no fewer than four crowned empresses reigning at the same time, demonstrating that multiple crowns for empresses were in use throughout the Palaiologan period.)

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Becoming 'empress of the Romans' was a ritualized yet variable process, which included any number of considerations and ceremonies, depending on the specific circumstances. The hoped-for result was an Orthodox empress, who had been appropriately named, welcomed, proclaimed, married, and crowned, all according to tradition. In practice, this process could differ significantly as each would-be empress needed to acquire only those particular aspects she was still lacking

1749 *Pachymeres* II, 413 (IV,29). *Gregoras* I, 109 (IV,9). *Kantakouzenos* I, 11 (Praefatio). For further notes, see Failler (1981B), 184–192. *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 75.

1750 Unlike early Byzantium, where the princes were crowned very young (see Dagron (2003), 77), Palaiologan heirs usually had to wait until they had reached adulthood and were able to perform their imperial role to receive the crown.

1751 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 143, fn. 372, see also 224 (VII), 225 (fn. 652).

1752 For details, see Hetherington (2003).

1753 *Gregoras* II, 789 (XV,11).

on her arrival in the imperial capital in order to fit the established paradigm. As the story of the unfortunate Sophia of Montferrat indicates, the ceremonies that followed the arrival of an imperial bride in Constantinople played a crucial role in her integration into Byzantine society, so it was in the best interests of each princess, and particularly of the foreign-born, to exemplify Byzantium in every possible respect. Once the rites of passage had been completed, the new empress could assume her role and use her talents, interests, and beliefs to place her own unique stamp on the conventional image.

XVII Courts and Rituals

Every gesture, every manifestation, every acclamation lends legitimacy to the emperor and the empress.[1754]

Élisabeth Malamut

Introduction

Creating an aura of uniqueness and magnitude, elaborate court rituals were intended to convey the power of the ruler and the riches and sophistication of the realm. Early and middle Byzantine masters of ceremonies exploited to the utmost the possibilities offered them by the monumental roads, gates, and halls of both the city of Constantinople and the Great Palace where the emperors lived. Crowds of senators, officials, ladies-in-waiting, and even members of the hippodrome factions also played an essential role in the complex ceremonies of the imperial court. Even as the Byzantine Empire weakened and its area continued to shrink, the city of Constantinople remained the setting of many important rituals;[1755] however, in the latter half of the middle Byzantine period, as the Great Palace became increasingly dilapidated and senators and hippodrome factions lost their original significance, the imperial family was forced to abandon their formerly grand residence and changes became unavoidable as the rituals adjusted themselves to the new circumstances in the empire.

Most of the descriptions of the rituals of the Byzantine Empire have come down to the present day in two treatises. The first of these is a voluminous work titled *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae* (*On the Ceremonies of the Byzantine Court*, hereafter abbreviated *De cerimoniis*), which was compiled by a tenth-century team of scribes and scholars, working under the auspices of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos. Based on a wide range of materials, some reaching as far back as the fifth century, *De cerimoniis* offers valuable information on the festive processions and ceremonies connected with liturgical feasts and daily routines of palace life but also describes comparatively infrequent rituals, such as imperial proclamations and coronations. Further complemented and revised under later emperors of the tenth century, *De cerimoniis* also contains lists of imperial officials by rank, advice for emperors on how to conduct audiences, matters of diplomacy, descriptions of military campaigns, and records pertaining to the burials of emperors.[1756]

1754 Malamut (2016A), 329 (translation mine).

1755 These included, for example, the processions on saints' feasts and the various celebrations that took place in Hagia Sophia and the city's important churches.

1756 For further information, sources, and literature, see *ODB* I, 595 ff. For the edition, see *De cerimoniis.* For translation and comments, see *Moffatt, Ceremonies.*

As far as the ceremonial role of the empress is concerned, *De cerimoniis* offers some important, albeit fragmentary, information as well as two chapters describing the wedding and coronation of an imperial bride.[1757] However, because rituals and court titles evolved (and occasionally disappeared) over the centuries, *De cerimoniis* as a source on late Byzantine festivities must be used with caution. It describes, for example, the empress's bath – a ritual that took place on the third day after the wedding and involved the hippodrome factions of the Blues and the Greens, patrician women, and members of the senate, all of whom acclaimed and accompanied the empress during her passage through parts of the Great Palace.[1758] Since late Byzantine empresses resided in the Blacherns Palace and there were no longer any hippodrome factions (nor crowds of senators and patrician women, for that matter), this particular ceremony had presumably been abandoned before the time period under consideration.[1759] Nevertheless, the material included in *De cerimoniis* is relevant to this study in that it describes the foundation from which later ceremonies evolved.

The second valuable source of information is the fourteenth-century work of an unknown author, designated *Pseudo-Kodinos* in scholarly literature. The text is by no means a detailed manual of court ritual; instead, the anonymous author selectively penned lists of court officials, descriptions of complex feasts, and details of rites and customs that may have been performed so rarely as to be in danger of being forgotten.[1760] According to *Pseudo-Kodinos,* the Palaiologan emperors took their ceremonial practices[1761] from the period of the Komnenos and Angelos dynasties (before 1204[1762]) even though, in some cases, the venues of the rituals had changed. Due to its progressive deterioration, the Great Palace was gradually abandoned as the main stage for imperial ceremonies; by the late Byzantine period, it was used only on special occasions, such as the coronation reception of the newly crowned emperor or imperial couple.[1763] Meanwhile, the imperial family had permanently relocated to the Blacherns Palace, and it was there that the majority of the rituals described by *Pseudo-Kodinos* took place. Although it deals with the ceremonies of the Palaiologan period, the text has little to say about empresses until the very last chapter, where the welcoming celebrations for the emperor's bride are described.

1757 These passages were discussed in the previous chapter. For empresses and ritual in early Byzantium, see James (2001), 50–58.

1758 *De cerimoniis,* 214 ff. (I,41). *Moffat, Ceremonies,* 214 ff.

1759 The ritual seems to have disappeared before the accession of the Komnenos dynasty.

1760 On the compilatory nature of *Pseudo-Kodinos*'s treatise, see *Pseudo-Kodinos,* 10 f.

1761 For an introduction to Byzantine ritual practices, see Mc Cormick (1985).

1762 *Pseudo-Kodinos,* 358.

1763 For an introduction to the Byzantine court and ritual in transition, see Magdalino (2011) and Macrides (2011).

Due to the selective nature of these two sources, the full extent of an empress's ceremonial duties in late Byzantium is difficult to establish. Other than the rather elaborate rituals surrounding the arrival of a future empress in Constantinople, her wedding, and the coronation ceremony that followed, *Pseudo-Kodinos* and *De cerimoniis*[1764] reveal next to nothing about the empress's role in the day-to-day (or feast-to-feast) ceremonial life of the empire. Still, several emperors considered it necessary, in the absence of an imperial consort, to appoint their daughters as *augoustai* so that proper etiquette could be followed during court ceremonies, indicating that the role of the empress, whatever its particulars, was not completely without substance. During the middle Byzantine period, Leo VI crowned his daughter *augousta* with the explanation that "not having an empress it was impossible to celebrate the banquets according to the prescribed tradition and custom."[1765] His objective was doubtless to provide a female figure who could receive, entertain, and oversee the wives of imperial officials in the course of court celebrations and receptions.

What the sources do reveal with great clarity is the discrepancy between the ceremonial roles of the emperor and the empress, something that was alluded to in the previous chapter with respect to the coronation ceremony. It was primarily the emperor who performed the ceremonies connected with liturgical feasts, and it was he who convened synods, exchanged symbolic kisses and bows with the patriarch, and granted state audiences to foreign legates and rulers. A similar inequality found expression in the arts: Cecily Hilsdale has remarked on the greater attention paid by the Theotokos and the Christ child to Emperor Manuel II in the famous portrait of the imperial family preserved in the manuscript of the works of Dionysios the Areopagite.[1766] By contrast, the ritual role of the emperor's wife was largely decorative. Dressed in her finery, which included jewels, purple and gold clothing, veils, and crowns, the empress was the feminine expression of the imperial image, adding luster, if not action, to the imperial stage. Unfortunately, the result of this disparity was that the authors of ceremonial books recorded even minute details regarding the role of the emperor while the role of the empress, no doubt well known to every master of ceremonies, fell into oblivion with only hints as to its shape scattered throughout the historical texts.

Despite their having a secondary role, empresses were involved in ceremonies on a regular basis as the biographical chapters reveal. Like the female members of European royal families today, they presided over courts, received embassies, and participated in family celebrations. Wearing their crowns and their purple, they grasped their scepters and listened as their names and imperial titles were acclaimed by their subjects. While the previous chapter dealt with the transformation of a princess into a Byzantine empress, this chapter will use the (limited)

1764 For a concise comparison of the two texts, see Macrides (2011), 219 ff.
1765 *Nicholas, Letters*, 32.
1766 Hilsdale (2014), 258 f. See also Ill. 11 in this book.

available evidence to examine how the image of female imperial power was constructed and presented to the outside world.

Symbols of feminine power: jewels and clothing

While a detailed inquiry into the clothing[1767] and jewels[1768] worn by the late Byzantine empresses goes beyond the scope of this study, a brief mention of these symbols of imperial office is necessary. As Jean-Michel Spieser noted, they were essential in communicating the power of the empress, standing as she did in the shadow of her husband,[1769] and they helped to distinguish her from all other women in the empire. The purple robe seems to have been the hallmark of the empress's office. In the *Vita of St. Theophano,* the saint fell asleep in a church as a child and dreamed that her white chiton turned purple.[1770] Based on the visual evidence, the costume worn by the late Byzantine empresses on official occasions consisted of purple silk robes with wide sleeves embroidered in gold and a narrow, jeweled scarf (*loros*), such as the one worn by Helene Dragaš in the aforementioned family portrait.[1771] According to recent research, "in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the robe of the empress had a train, which was often draped over the left forearm (. . .)."[1772] The empress's clothing was frequently studded with jewels or pearls, and imperial seals show embroidery work in a variety of floral and geometric designs. Some articles of her wardrobe were apparently highly ornate and, in the middle Byzantine period, were even used to adorn the imperial quarters on solemn occasions. *De cerimoniis* mentions several festive outfits, including a (riding?) cloak preserved in the Constantinopolitan Pantheon and the peacock *chlamys* (mantle) kept in the Magnaura Palace.[1773] The middle Byzantine *Vita of St. Athanasia of Aegina* mentions that the saint was dressed as an empress in a "purple robe decorated with gems and pearls."[1774]

While purple seems to have dominated the imperial wardrobe, certain occasions demanded other choices. White signified deepest mourning and was worn after the death of the closest and most elevated members of the imperial

1767 For an interesting article on the evolution of the late Byzantine ceremonial costume, see Parani (2007). For the middle Byzantine period, see Malamut (2016A), 353–358. Piltz (1997). For a description of an empress's ceremonial costume, see Scholz (2003), 147 f.

1768 For further information, see Malamut (2013A), 655.

1769 On the role of the regalia of an empress in Late Antiquity and the early Byzantine period, see Spieser (2002), especially 600 ff.

1770 *Kurtz, Theophano*, 4.

1771 Hilsdale (2014), 254.

1772 Hennessy (2006), 136.

1773 *De cerimoniis*, 581 (II,15). *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 581.

1774 *Vita of St. Athanasia of Aegina*, 191. (Trans.) *Holy Women of Byzantium*, 153. See also Maguire (1997), 257.

family. According to the *Memoirs* of John Kantakouzenos, he and his wife wore white the day after their proclamation as a sign of mourning for Andronikos III.[1775] This suggests that late Byzantine empresses may have donned white mourning garments when their husbands died and replaced them with the black robes described by *Pseudo-Kodinos* at some later point in time.[1776] Nevertheless, during coronation ceremonies, even dowagers were allowed to add a little color to their appearance by putting a violet mantle over their black attire. If an empress decided to take her vows, she then dressed in the traditional black robe (*himation*) and accompanying veil[1777] of a Byzantine nun. Like emperors, empresses wore purple shoes.[1778]

In respect to jewels, every late Byzantine empress received a crown[1779] and a scepter at her coronation. (Donning an imperial *chlamys*, described by *De cerimoniis* as part of the coronation ceremony,[1780] is not mentioned in any of the late Byzantine texts.) In the earlier part of the middle Byzantine period, empresses wore crowns identical to those of emperors: an open stemma with a large precious stone set in the middle of the forehead.[1781] The *Vita of St. Athanasia of Aegina* mentions a crown that "had crosses in the front and back."[1782] Gradually, an open crown with pinnacles and hanging pendants prevailed among the late Byzantine empresses,[1783] clearly distinguished from the closed, rounded crown (*kamelaukion*) of the emperor. Fashion dictated that the empress should wear her crown over a veil or net that came down to her shoulders.[1784]

Unlike the West, Byzantium had no concept of a particular crown for coronations.[1785] Instead, the sources suggest that each crown was unique, made

1775 *Kantakouzenos* III, 167 (III,27).
1776 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 222 f. (VII).
1777 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 222 ff. (VII).
1778 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 266. (XII).
1779 For an interesting study on the appearance of the imperial crown in late Byzantium, see Hetherington (2003).
1780 *De cerimoniis*, 203 (I,40). *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 203.
1781 In the image of their coronation by Christ, Romanos II and Eudokia receive identical diadems (see Piltz (1997), 40, and fig. 4) or Nikephoros III Botaneiates and Maria of Alania in MS Coislin. 79, fol. 2bis v., Paris Bibliotheque Nationale.
1782 *Vita of St. Athanasia of Aegina*, 191. (Trans.) *Holy Women of Byzantium*, 153. See also Maguire (1997), 257.
1783 The pinnacled crowns of the empresses are depicted on coins from as early as the sixth century. For details, see Gkantzios-Drápelová (2016), 75. Nevertheless, it seems that even late Byzantine empresses may have worn rounded crowns without pinnacles. In the founder image in the Theotokos Church in Apollonia, Theodora Palaiologina is depicted wearing such a crown. For details, see Fingarova (2011–2012), 287. Hetherington (2003), 161.
1784 Hennessy (2006), 136.
1785 Hetherington (2003), 161.

specifically for the one to be crowned. It is recorded that Sophia of Montferrat, on leaving the empire, took her crown with her as a souvenir of the years she had spent in Constantinople. If it had been the coronation crown of the Byzantine empresses, her husband would surely have demanded its return for the use of her successor, Maria of Trebizond.

While imperial crowns were normally made from gold and decorated with precious stones and pearls, there were exceptions. Because Anna of Savoy had pawned some of the coronation jewels and the Second Civil War had drained the imperial treasury, the crowns used at the coronation of John VI and Eirene Kantakouzene "only pretended to be made of gold and precious stone; they were partly from gilded leather, as the leatherworkers occasionally make them, partly from glass shining with different colors. There were also a few priceless stones and the shimmer of mother-of-pearl, the mark of true jewels, which did not betray the eye."[1786]

In addition to the crown, the late Byzantine empresses also received a scepter, the upper part of which was studded with pearls and gems. It was meant to evoke a palm branch, a symbol of peace, and was held in the right hand. Though the evidence is scanty, this *baion* seems to have differed in shape from the scepters of earlier empresses. Also, empresses who had held sovereign rule (without a husband), such as Eirene the mother of Constantine VI or Theodora the Macedonian, were sometimes depicted on coins as holding an orb in their right hand and a scepter in their left;[1787] however, none of the available visual evidence suggests that this tradition was continued by the empresses of the Palaiologan era (such as Anna of Savoy during her regency).

Titles and names

As titles were essential to the hierarchy of the Byzantine court, determining an individual's place in the fixed order, the use of titles[1788] by the late Byzantine empresses also deserves consideration. Late Byzantine texts describe the empress as *despoina*, *augousta*, *autokratorissa,* and *basilis,* all of which are derived from titles used by the emperor or his male relatives (*despot, augoustos, autokrator*, and *basileus*). The title *despoina* (sometimes *despoina of the Romans*) was already,

1786 *Gregoras* II, 787 f. (XV,11).

1787 For details, see Maslev (1966), 322, 343.

1788 For literature on the titles used by Byzantine empresses, see especially the systematic study of Bensammar (1976). Smythe (1997), especially 142 f. Hill (1994), 44–79. (Unfortunately, I was unable to access this study.) Hill (1999), 26 f. Maslev (1966), 310 f. For titles of middle Byzantine empresses and for a good introduction into the system of titles set up by Alexios Komnenos, see Hill (1999), 96–119, see especially 102. Garland (1999), 2. For empresses' titles in early Byzantium, see James (2001), 117–132.

although rarely,[1789] in use in the early Byzantine period,[1790] not only for regents and sovereigns but also for uncrowned women (e.g., Anna Dalassene[1791]). It means 'mistress' and is the most universal title denoting an empress in the narrative sources,[1792] *Pseudo-Kodinos*,[1793] and the patriarchal correspondence.[1794] Palaiologan empresses apparently acquired the right to use this title at their proclamation, for both Anna of Moscow and Eirene-Adelheid were described as *despoinas* even though they were never crowned.[1795]

Throughout most of the Byzantine period, *augousta* was used to describe a crowned empress. A derivative of the emperor's Latin title (*augustus*), it appeared in the early medieval period and came into frequent use after 527.[1796] The title was originally applied to the co-ruler of a senior emperor who had delegated power to a female associate[1797] (sometimes a daughter or sister).[1798] In the Komnenian period, there could be only one *augousta* at a time; when the emperor died, the title passed to the wife of his successor.[1799] By contrast, in late Byzantium several empresses could hold the title simultaneously following their coronations.[1800]

1789 James (2001), 125.

1790 The title *despoina* was used as early as the time of Empress Theodora, the wife of Justinian. Garland (1999), 20. Bensammar (1976), 270 ff. On the use of the title *despoina* in the Komnenian period, see Hill (1999), 114–117.

1791 For a detailed discussion, see Hill (1999), 116 f.

1792 *Sphrantzes*, the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy, Doukas,* and the author of a short chronicle all use the title *despoina* to describe an empress. (See *Sphrantzes*, 12 (V,1). *Gouillard, Synodikon*, 103. *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 639. *Doukas*, 133, 3 (XX, 3)). For the meaning of this title in earlier centuries, see Bensammar (1976), 284–290, 286.

1793 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 172 (IV), 266 (XII).

1794 *Athanasios*, 124, (trans.) *ibid.*, *Letter 84*, 224, (trans.) 225. For further details, see *ibid.*, 410–414.

1795 Sphrantzes (*Sphrantzes* 12 (V,1)) and one of the late Byzantine minor chronicles (*Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 639) call Anna ἡ δέσποινα ἡ Ῥῶσα. Only on one occasion is Anna titled *augousta*: the inscription is preserved on the *sakkos* sent soon after her wedding to the metropolitan of the Rus, Photios. It reflects a reality that was planned for the bride from Rus but that was prevented by her early death. See also Hilsdale (2014), 297.

1796 For the use of the title in Late Antiquity, see Spieser (2002), especially 595 f. Mc Clanan (2002), 10. See Garland (1999), 2. James (1997), 128.

1797 Bensammar (1976), 272 ff. On the use of the title *augousta* in early Byzantium, see James (1997), 128 ff. Hill (1999), 102.

1798 See, for example, *De cerimoniis*, 629 ff. (II,29). Barbara Hill noted that it was used by a crowned empress as long as "the emperor who crowned her was still alive." Hill (1999), 102.

1799 Hill (1999), 103 f.

1800 *Athanasios*, 366. See also *Vogt, De cerimoniis*, xv. Runciman (1984), 12.

It was also during this period that *augousta*[1801] came to apply exclusively to the crowned wife of an emperor and was used mainly on official documents and seals. The women who could acquire the title and the circumstances under which this took place also underwent significant change in the final centuries of the empire. In their study on Byzantine imperial coronations as described in *De cerimoniis*, Ostrogorsky and Stein noted the circumstances under which the middle Byzantine emperors bestowed the title *augousta*: "As far as we know, imperial wives received the title *augousta* either at their marriage, on the accession of their husbands to the throne, as a reward for giving birth to their first son, (. . .) or on the death of a senior *augousta* (. . .)."[1802] Except for the case of Eirene-Yolanda, who was crowned and received the title following the birth of her son John, these conditions were no longer applicable in late Byzantium.[1803]

Several empresses used the title *autokratorissa* concurrently with that of *augousta*. In late Byzantium, the title *autokratorissa* elevated the senior empress over the *augousta(s)* just as, in the middle Byzantine period, the senior empress was the *augousta* while junior empresses were called *basilissas*.[1804] At least three late Byzantine empresses styled themselves *autokratorissa*: Theodora Palaiologina,[1805] Anna of Savoy,[1806] and Helene Dragaš. It is not clear from the sources under what circumstances they assumed the title, which was not used as a common descriptive term (like *basilis* or *despoina*) but only for seals and solemn documents. Theodora Palaiologina's use of *autokratorissa* can be seen in her *Confession of Faith*, meaning that she adopted the title in 1283 at the latest. As she was never a regent, she may have begun using the title at some point after the second coronation of her husband in 1261 (when he assumed the male form of the title). The coronation of the junior empress Anna of Hungary in 1272 (after which Anna began using the title *augousta*) would have been another likely occasion. The evidence that Anna of Savoy also described herself as *autokratorissa* can be found on a seal that cannot be precisely dated. She may have begun using the title following her

1801 On the origin and use of the title *augousta* in the middle Byzantine period, see Hill (1999), 102–108, for a summary, see 108. For the development of this title in early Byzantium, see James (2001), 119–125.

1802 Ostrogorsky–Stein (1932), 220 (translation mine). In her study of the circumstances under which an empress came to use the title *augousta*, Dionysia Missiou claimed that an empress could only receive this title once she had given birth to an heir to the throne (Missiou (1982)). In late Byzantium, the known facts do not bear out this claim. Most empresses began using the title following their coronation well before they had given birth to any children. Two empresses, Sophia of Montferrat and Maria of Trebizond, never had children and yet used the title.

1803 Compare with the conclusions of Elisabeth Bensammar (Bensammar (1976), 271, 280).

1804 Bensammar (1976), 273 f.

1805 Bensammar (1976), 288. Mitsiou (2016), 92. See also *Petrides, Chrysobulle*, 26.

1806 Schlumberger (1900), 480, n. 172.

husband's accession to supreme power in 1328, or she may have taken it when she assumed the regency in order to undergird her authority at a very insecure moment in her reign. It is also possible that she began to call herself *autokratorissa* to maintain her seniority as the first of the *augoustas* after the coronations of Eirene Kantakouzene and Helene Palaiologina in 1347. In the same way, a seal serves as proof that Helene Dragaš called herself *autokratorissa* at some point, but the timing must remain a matter of conjecture.[1807] The most likely occasions for her to have begun using the title would have been following her coronation as the wife of the senior emperor (1392), after the coronation of one of her junior colleagues [Eirene Gattilusio (1400), Sophia of Montferrat (1421), or Maria of Trebizond (1426)], or after Manuel's death in 1425, when she intermittently governed the empire for her sons whenever duty called them elsewhere.

The title *basilis* was broadly used to describe empresses and imperial women, especially in the fourteenth-century narrative sources. Gregoras and Kantakouzenos used this title to denote Empress Anna, and *Pseudo-Kodinos* employed it for the newly crowned wife of the emperor.[1808] Furthermore, Doukas called Helene Palaiologina by this title in his work.[1809] It must be noted that '*basilis*' was also used to denote lower-ranking women of the late Byzantine imperial family, such as the illegitimate daughter of Andronikos II, Eirene.[1810] The *Vatican Epithalamion*, dated by Cecily Hennessy to the fourteenth century, also uses this title when referring to the daughter of John V.[1811]

Another title, *basilissa*,[1812] which in earlier centuries was bestowed on an empress following her coronation and was the equivalent of the title *basileus*,[1813] ceased to apply to senior empresses in the middle of the eleventh century.[1814] Under the Komnenos dynasty, it could denote a former empress, such as Maria of Alania, while the reigning empress was addressed as '*augousta*.'[1815] In the late Byzantine period, it was mostly used in connection with the wives of despots,[1816] including Eirene Choumnaina (the daughter-in-law of Andronikos II), Theodora Doukaina (the wife of Michael II of Epiros), and the wives of Constantine XI, both of whom died before his accession to the throne.[1817] This title was also adopted by at least

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1807 Pančenko (1908), 106 f.
1808 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 234 (VII).
1809 *Doukas*, 133, 3 (XX,3).
1810 For the edited text, see Brooks (2006), 228.
1811 Codex *Vaticanus* gr. 1851, fol. 6r.
1812 On the use of this title in earlier periods, see Bensammar (1976), 278–284. Mc Clanan (2002), 10. For the middle Byzantine period, see Hill (1999), 108–114. James (2001), 125. Gordana Babić argues that the title *basilissa* was never used for late Byzantine empresses. See Babić (1987), 58 f.
1813 Bensammar (1976), 280 f. Hill (1999), 114.
1814 Bensammar (1976), 271, 283.
1815 Hill (1999), 114, 117.
1816 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 218 (VII), 266 f. (XII).
1817 See, for example, *Sphrantzes*, 90 (XV,4).

one non-Byzantine female ruler living in the vicinity of the empire: Francesca Acciaiouli Tocco, the fifteenth-century Duchess of Cephalonia, was known to have used it on her official documents.[1818]

From the time of the Komnenos dynasty, distinguished surnames were another mark of power and status in Byzantium.[1819] While it was common to choose the surname of the most illustrious branch of one's family in the middle period, members of the imperial family and aristocracy of late Byzantium attached the surnames of several exalted relatives to their own. That the name 'Palaiologos' needed time to acquire sufficient glory is reflected by the fact that the members of this dynasty used multiple surnames almost until the end of the fourteenth century. Michael VIII styled himself 'Komnenos Angelos Doukas' as did Andronikos II and Andronikos III. With the growing popularity of the Palaiologan dynasty, this practice gradually faded, and John V and Andronikos IV used only the name 'Komnenos' in addition to that of 'Palaiologos.' The remaining members of the dynasty were content with 'Palaiologos.'

The surnames[1820] employed by the late Byzantine empresses do not follow the same pattern as those selected by their husbands. Empress Theodora used the names of her relatives, 'Doukaina' and 'Komnene,' as well as 'Palaiologina,' a name derived from that of her husband. Anna of Hungary used only the name 'Palaiologina' while her successor, possibly eager to display her newly acquired nobility, styled herself 'Eirene Komnene Doukaina Palaiologina.' Next in line, Maria-Rita again used the surname 'Doukaina' along with 'Palaiologina.' All subsequent empresses (except for Eirene Kantakouzene, naturally) contented themselves with the name 'Palaiologina,' with the exception of Maria of Trebizond, whom the sources identify as 'Maria Komnene Kantakouzene Palaiologina.' This reflects the Trebizond custom of using multiple surnames.[1821]

Empresses clearly had a choice regarding which surnames they would use, and besides adding surnames, they could also omit them. As far as the sources are concerned, Theodora Palaiologina did not use 'Batatzaina' (inherited from her father) nor 'Laskarina' (denoting the Nicene imperial family, her close kin). Those surnames may have been distasteful to her husband, who had had a complicated relationship with the Nicene emperors John III Batatzes and Theodore II Laskaris and who had deposed the last Laskarid emperor. Similarly, Helene Palaiologina, the daughter of

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1818 Chrysostomides (1982), 132.

1819 Runciman (1984), 17. Angeliki Laiou pointed out that "the Byzantines found it quite proper to adopt the names of in-laws, even if the connection had taken place sometime in the past; and by the late fourteenth century, the Byzantine aristocrats might have three or four great names attached to their own." (Laiou (1973), 135). See also Hill (1999), 59.

1820 On the use of surnames under the Komnenoi, see Hill (1999), 136.

1821 This practice died out only with the last Trebizond empress, Helene Kantakouzene Komnene, when the Trebizond Empire fell to the Ottoman Turks in August 1461. For a biography of this empress, see Nicol (1996), 120–125.

John VI Kantakouzenos, described herself merely as 'Helene Palaiologina' after her marriage to John V Palaiologos, possibly because she needed to express her commitment to her husband's cause and so separate herself from the Kantakouzene clan, which actively opposed John V until 1357.

The ceremonial role of the late Byzantine empresses: potpourri[1822]

The main ceremonial role of an empress apparently lay in receiving and entertaining the wives of imperial officials and female members of the court during liturgical feasts. Five times a year – on the Feast of the Birth of Christ, on Epiphany, on Palm Sunday, on Great Sunday, and on the Feast of the Holy Spirit[1823]– Palaiologan emperors donned festive attire and dined with their officials[1824] while their consorts most likely hosted the wives. Occasionally, empresses also gave banquets for foreign rulers when there was a woman ruler or consort involved. In the tenth century Empress Helene, the wife of Constantine VII, entertained Olga of Rus in the course of her stay in Constantinople. Of course, the empress did not sit at the same table as Princess Olga (who sat with the girdled patrician women) but with the emperor, as was customary on most solemn occasions.[1825] Only at a later banquet for women, organized by the empress in honor of her Rusian guest in the Pentakouboukleion of the Chapel of St. Paul, did the empress share a table with the princess and members of the imperial family.[1826] Olga was also given an audience in the private apartments of the imperial family in the presence of the imperial couple and their offspring.

Another ceremonial duty of the empress during special liturgical feasts was to give audiences to the wives of important imperial officials. *De cerimoniis* mentions one such audience, which took place in the gallery of Hagia Sophia on Easter Sunday:

> It should be known that when the divine liturgy begins, the members of the *kouboukleion* immediately go up into the gallery and the *augousta* goes out from the robing-room, which is in the gallery, and sits on a chair, and all the members of the *kouboukleion* stand to either side while the eunuch *protospatharioi* stand behind the *augousta*. When the *praipositos* receives a sign from the *augousta* he goes out with

1822 For a brief overview, see Leszka–Leszka (2017), 88 f.

1823 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 166 (IV), (trans.) 167. *De cerimoniis* also mentions five liturgical feasts during which the emperor and his court took part in the procession to Hagia Sophia. These feasts included Easter Sunday, Pentecost, the Transfiguration, the Nativity, and the Epiphany. For details, see *De cerimoniis*, 22.

1824 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 166 (IV).

1825 *De cerimoniis*, 595 ff. (II,15), 603 (II,18). *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 603.

1826 *De cerimoniis*, 598 (II,15). *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 598.

> two *ostiarioi* holding staffs and leads in group 1: girdled patrician women; group 2: *magistrissai*; group 3: proconsular patrician women; group 4: patricians who are *strategissai*; group 5: proconsular women of the themes of the rank of eparch and women of the rank of questor; group 6: proconsular women of the themes of the rank of eparch, the *droungaria* of the Watch, *protospathariai*, *spatharokandidatai*, *tourmarchissai*, *topoterotissai*, consular *spathariai* and *stratorissai*; group 7: *kometissai*, *skribonissai*, *domestikai* of the regiments, *vestetorissai*, women of silentiary rank; *kometissai* of the *arithmos*, and *kometissai* of the *hikanatoi*. After the *augousta* has given them all the kiss, she signals to the *praipositos* and he says, "If you please." They [recite] the "For many good years" and go out. The *augousta* stands up and goes into the robing-room with her household *koubikoulariai* while the rest of the *kouboukleion* go down to the emperor.[1827]

The audiences of the middle Byzantine empresses were clearly large undertakings, involving a number of people and significant organization. Somewhat surprisingly, the text does not mention that the female officials kissed the feet or knees of the empress; instead, these women received a kiss *from* the empress, possibly the biblical 'kiss of peace' in connection with the message of Easter. Equally remarkable is the fact that this reception took place during the liturgy, which means that the empress could not participate (even passively) in the service.

Late Byzantine sources do not mention similar audiences, with the exception of the following incident, which took place in the antechamber of Eirene-Yolanda in Nymphaion in Asia Minor on the Feast of the Holy Apostles in 1293:[1828]

> As it was a great feast on which (. . .) the empress gave audience to the most noble ladies, many illustrious women arrived, including an older noblewoman named Strategopoulina. (. . .) It was not yet time for her to go to the empress, and therefore, she waited outside, expecting the invitation [to enter]. At this time, the wife of the *porphyrogennetos* also arrived with much splendor, an escort, and a large retinue. (. . .). The elder lady was supposed to stand in the presence of the one who was newly arrived and who was second in dignity only to the empress. Strategopoulina, however, refused to thus honor her granddaughter because of her [Strategopoulina's] advanced age and on the pretext that the latter was a child. (. . .)[1829]

Although the text says little as to how the audience was actually conducted, it clearly differed in several respects from the one described earlier. Even taking into account the possibility that the character of the audience was influenced by the feast being celebrated, the later event still appears more individual in scope. While noblewomen of the middle Byzantine period entered in groups, Pachymeres states

1827 *De cerimoniis*, 67 ff. (I,9). (Trans.) *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 67 f. See also Kazhdan–McCormick (1997), 183.

1828 June 29.

1829 *Pachymeres* III, 173 (VIII, 19). (Translation mine.) See also *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 382.

that "it was not yet time for *her*[1830] [Strategopoulina] to enter,"[1831] indicating that women approached the empress individually (or in small groups) in late Byzantium. Such an arrangement not only reflects the diminished size of the imperial court but also suggests that, instead of merely receiving an acclamation, the empress spoke a few words, however impersonal, to each of the women. The fact that the incident took place in Asia Minor shows that feasts connected with the liturgical calendar were celebrated even if the imperial couple were not in the capital.

Naturally, audiences were not limited to feast days. Empresses regularly opened the doors of their audience chambers to important representatives of foreign states, local ambassadors,[1832] and petitioners with their various dilemmas and grievances. Such occasions followed detailed ritual prescriptions. The official audience granted by Empress Helene to Princess Olga took place in the presence of numerous court dignitaries. To demonstrate the superiority of her position, the empress did not speak directly to the Rusian princess (whom *De cerimoniis* calls *archontissa*); instead, she used the master of ceremonies as a mediator (who, of necessity, must have been assisted by interpreters). Although they say nothing about the rituals observed on these occasions, the sources mention several embassies received by late Byzantine empresses. Eirene-Yolanda, for example, granted an audience to legates from Montferrat, who brought the news of her brother's death along with a request that she (or her eldest son) take over the government of the marquisate.[1833] Maria-Rita entertained the Bulgarian tsar in Didymoteichon, and Anna of Savoy received both the embassies of the pope and the legates of John Kantakouzenos. As the biographical chapters demonstrate, empresses of this period also admitted various petitioners into their presence: monks requesting support for their monastic houses or complaining that their land had been stolen or their privileges ignored, subjects asking for justice or mercy, and relatives seeking the empress's intervention on behalf of other family members.

Besides liturgical feasts, audiences, and state affairs, empresses also participated in numerous "family" events: baptisms, weddings, coronations, and burials. Occasionally, they may even have assumed an active role in these ceremonies. Theodora Palaiologina held the nuptial crowns at the wedding of her eldest son and his second wife, for example. Similarly, *Pseudo-Kodinos* states that widowed empresses, wearing their crowns and holding their scepters, participated in the coronations of their successors.[1834]

Imperial acclamations, whereby the people wished their sovereigns a long life and reign ('many years'), were an important aspect of the various ceremonies and processions. According to *De cerimoniis*, people of the middle Byzantine

1830 Italics added.
1831 "Ἐπεὶ δὲ οὔπω καιρὸς ἐκάλει εἰσελθεῖν πρὸς τὴν αὐγούσταν ἐκείνην (…)."
1832 See also Kazhdan–McCormick (1997), 183.
1833 *Palaiologos*, 32.
1834 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 222 f.

period acclaimed the empress by name or simply as '*augousta* of the Romans.' The acclamation of an empress typically followed that of an emperor and preceded that of the purple-born children. These acknowledgements could take place during the Feast of the Nativity,[1835] Easter,[1836] Pentecost,[1837] the coronation of an emperor,[1838] the birth of a *porphyrogennetos* child,[1839] the investiture of court title holders,[1840] chariot races,[1841] or victory celebrations.[1842] Acclamations sometimes took the form of prayers requesting divine protection (namely that of the Holy Spirit) and salvation for the *augousta*.[1843] Such petitions characterized the empresses as 'pious and God-loving,'[1844] 'adorning the imperial throne,'[1845] 'radiating the light,'[1846] and 'supported by God.'[1847] Late Byzantine acclamations mostly wished the imperial consort a long reign. The fact that empresses were acclaimed on various occasions does not necessarily indicate that they participated in them. Palaiologan sources mention situations in which acclamations were performed in an empress's absence, one example being the acclamation of Anna of Savoy during the imperial proclamation of John VI and his wife in Didymoteichon in October 1341.[1848]

The four courts of the *despoina*

Although the specific rituals performed by the late Byzantine empresses are seldom mentioned, the sources do contain information concerning the four types of court over which the *despoinas* presided. The first of these was the court in its narrowest sense: the ladies-in-waiting and trusted servants, each with specific duties and responsibilities.[1849] From the middle Byzantine sources we learn the titles of these women. The *koitonitai* served the empress in her private rooms while the *protovestiariai* were in charge of the imperial wardrobe. The *parakoimomene* guarded the sleep of the empress, and the *primikerissa* orchestrated her ceremonial entries. Finally, the *koubikoulariai* escorted the empress during her public

1835 *De cerimoniis,* 36 f. (I,2).
1836 *De cerimoniis*, 45 (I,4).
1837 *De cerimoniis*, 60 (I,9).
1838 *De cerimoniis*, 196 (I,28).
1839 *De cerimoniis*, 215 f. (I,42).
1840 *De cerimoniis*, 222 (I,43). 266 (I,53).
1841 *De cerimoniis*, 2315 (I,69).
1842 *De cerimoniis*, 649 (II,43). *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 649.
1843 *De cerimoniis*, 47 f. (I,5). (Trans.) *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 47 f.
1844 *De cerimoniis*, 47 (I,5). (Trans.) *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 47.
1845 *De cerimoniis*, 279 (I,69).
1846 *De cerimoniis*, 295 (I,65).
1847 *De cerimoniis*, 350 (I,71).
1848 *Gregoras* II, 611 f. (XII,12).
1849 Herrin (2014), 58 f.

appearances.[1850] These women were considered part of the imperial household and resided in the palace for the most part, standing ready to serve their mistress whenever the need arose. These titles for the female servants of the empress do not appear in the Palaiologan texts. Noblewomen of the later period generally used titles derived from those of their husbands, and they did not live in the palace as a rule but came to join their sovereign on important occasions. Only ordinary servants and the closest ladies-in-waiting remained at the palace at all times. A well-known example of such an attendant was Zampea, also known as Isabella de la Rochette, who came to Byzantium from Italy with the young Johanna of Savoy and left the court only after the victory of John VI Kantakouzenos in 1347.[1851] Kantakouzenos, who apparently knew her personally, wrote of her that "she was more intelligent than other women and due to her learning and other abilities it was appropriate that she lived in the imperial palace."[1852] The sources also reveal that these confidantes exercised significant influence over their mistresses. Alexios Apokaukos, after his failed attempt to abduct the young John V and make him his son-in-law, bribed Anna of Savoy's ladies-in-waiting to acquire a pardon, which he obtained despite such a serious breach of trust on his part.[1853]

In addition to female servants and companions, empresses also had male staff members. According to *De cerimoniis*, these included the steward of the empress's table and her wine steward.[1854] Kantakouzenos mentioned the wine bearer (*oinochoos*) of Anna of Savoy in his writings, an apparent confirmation of the existence of such servants in late Byzantium.[1855] There were also chancery officials, who facilitated the empress's acts of patronage and issued documents testifying to her activities as ruler and governor of the empire.[1856] Unfortunately, the sources do not volunteer any information as to who selected the servants and ladies-in-waiting of the late Byzantine empresses nor whether the latter were personally involved in their investiture.

While eunuchs often played a prominent role in the households of the middle Byzantine period in particular,[1857] Palaiologan sources almost never speak of them in connection with imperial consorts. *Pseudo-Kodinos* mentions eunuchs only

1850 For further information on the servants of the empress, see Malamut (2016A), 346.

1851 For further details and sources on Isabella de la Rochette, see *PLP*, n. 6446. Isabella's reasons for leaving Byzantium are not clarified in the sources, but it seems that she became entangled in the political schemes of the anti-Kantakouzenos faction and possibly proved unwilling to live in the empire under the government of John Kantakouzenos.

1852 *Kantakouzenos* I, 204 f. (I,42).

1853 *Gregoras* II, 711 (XIV,5). Muratore (1906), 171.

1854 *De cerimoniis*, 725 (II,52). *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 725.

1855 *Kantakouzenos* II, 277 (III,46), 394 f. (III,64).

1856 See also *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 317 f.

1857 See, for example, Herrin (2000), especially 24 f., 33. (See also fn. 90 for further bibliographic information on eunuchs.) Herrin (2001), 83, 107–113.

when describing the coronation of the empress, noting that they were responsible for carrying or leading her to the *solea* prior to her receiving the crown.[1858] Only a few eunuchs of the Palaiologan period are known by name. Sometime before the persecution of the anti-Unionists commenced, a certain John, a eunuch and later a metropolitan of Herakleia (Pontus), had been a member of Empress Theodora's household.[1859] Another eunuch, John Kallikrinites, is known to have been a courtier of Maria of Bulgaria.[1860]

The limited employment of eunuchs in comparison with previous periods may perhaps be explained by the fact that Palaiologan empresses seldom governed independently and thus did not require eunuch military leaders or administrators, men whom previous generations of empresses had relied on to faithfully support their cause (since the eunuchs themselves were unable to ascend the throne). In other words, there was simply no opportunity for eunuch servants to rise to prominence during this period. While it is true that the only late Byzantine empress to rule the empire for several years, Anna of Savoy, did not make use of eunuchs during the initial part of her reign either, this may be ascribed at least in part to the actions of Alexios Apokaukos, who promptly assumed command of the army and, along with Patriarch John Kalekas, made certain that the empress did not bestow her favor (and with it, her power) on anyone outside their small circle. Yet another explanation for the absence of powerful eunuchs in late Byzantium might be that earlier empresses, having less freedom of movement outside the female quarters of the palace, relied heavily on eunuchs to facilitate their contact with the outside world and to assist them in implementing plans and policies. By contrast, late Byzantine empresses lived less secluded lives and were frequently directly involved in the political events of their time; therefore, they were less dependent on eunuchs. While such servants may still have been part of the household, they did not achieve the same prestige as their counterparts of the early and middle Byzantine periods.

On festive occasions, the empress was surrounded by a larger court, which consisted of female members of the imperial family as well as the consorts of important court officials. The noblewomen who had welcomed the empress to Constantinople as a bride[1861] continued to pay their respects to her on important feast days of the Orthodox Church[1862] (such were the ladies received by Eirene-Yolanda on the Feast of the Holy Apostles described earlier), and they joined the empress on other special occasions, such as coronations or audiences for foreign princes. These women did not reside at the Blacherns Palace, however. Their titles

1858 *Kantakouzenos* I, 199 (I,41). *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 224 (VII). *Majeska, Travellers*, 109 f.
1859 *Gregoras, Vie de Jean*, 38.
1860 *MM* II, 388 f., n. 573. *Darrouzès, Regestes* VI, 374 f., n. 3131.
1861 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 266 (XII).
1862 See, for example, *Pachymeres* III, 173 (VIII, 19).

were derived from those of their spouses and, presumably, followed the same hierarchy of precedence. The written sources do not expressly reveal whether the clothing and head coverings of the noblewomen indicated by color and design their standing;[1863] nevertheless, the Vatican *Epithalamion* portrays the imperial bride surrounded by women in white hats with rounded tops and two horizontal or vertical lines.[1864] As the text expressly describes the women as relatives of *kaisars*, *sebastokrators,* and *despots*,[1865] the markings on their hats may have indicated the positions of the highest-placed ladies of an empress's court,[1866] mirroring the known "hierarchy of hats" of the male court officials.

In the emperor's absence, the empress also presided over his court, which comprised members of the imperial family as well as various officials. In addition to Anna of Savoy, who regularly headed this court after her husband's death in 1341, other empresses are known to have convened it in emergency situations when their husbands were absent from the capital. Such was the case of Eirene Kantakouzene when the Latins began burning Byzantine ships near Constantinople in the summer of 1348. (John VI was ill in Thrace at the time.) Needing to make decisions as to how to proceed, Eirene gathered the court and requested advice from officials as well as the foremost inhabitants of the city.[1867]

Owing to the less centralized character of the late Byzantine state, Eirene-Yolanda, Maria-Rita, and Anna of Savoy established courts in Thessalonike, the empire's second most important city, where they independently governed both the city and the surrounding region.[1868] The extent of their independence can be observed indirectly in the following events: after the First Civil War broke out between Andronikos II and his grandson, Andronikos III, the senior emperor considered it essential to remove Maria-Rita from Thessalonike to prevent his opponent from using the city and its resources to his advantage.[1869] Similarly, the fact that John V dispatched a new governor to Thessalonike to take charge of the city only *after* the death of his mother shows that the empress had governed competently on his behalf.[1870] While there is no official text defining the position of these empresses in Thessalonike, based on the evidence presented in the biographical chapters, it is possible to conclude that they governed the region with a substantial measure of independence: granting audiences to foreign ambassadors, judging

1863 For details, see *Pseudo-Kodinos*, Tables IV–V (in the back, no page numbers included). For the clothing of the female members of the imperial court, see *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 353–356.

1864 For dating, see Hennessy (2006). See also Strzygowski (1901), 550 f.

1865 Strzygowski (1901), 550.

1866 For further details on these hats, see Dawson (2006), 47 ff.

1867 *Gregoras* II, 845 f. (XVII,1).

1868 For details on the reigns of these empresses and their governance of Thessalonike, see the biographical chapters as well as Malamut (2014B).

1869 *Kantakouzenos* I, 129 (I,26), 150 (I,31).

1870 Loenertz (1970), 315.

legal cases, issuing orders, making donations, and being involved in local politics. Nonetheless, the region surrounding Thessalonike did not become completely independent of the government in Constantinople during the administrations of these women. Following their deaths, the city always returned smoothly to the control of the emperors on the Bosphorus.

Several courts, one empire

For most of the Palaiologan period, two imperial couples held power simultaneously in the Byzantine Empire, the senior emperor and empress usually training their successors by example and instruction. This coexistence of ruling couples increased the stability of the empire while strengthening the imperial dynasty (except when the couples were in conflict, of course). When the senior emperor died, his junior colleague (usually a son or grandson) was able to step into his position without additional ceremony.[1871] In a similar way, the junior empress was thoroughly prepared to assume the ceremonial duties of her predecessor at any time. Occasionally, there were even more than two empresses at the late Byzantine court. This phenomenon reached its peak when Anna of Savoy, Eirene Kantakouzene, Helene Palaiologina and Eirene Palaiologina, all duly proclaimed and crowned, were using the title *augousta* in 1354.

To make the situation even more complex, besides there being several emperors or empresses, there were repeatedly multiple imperial courts in existence in late Byzantium.[1872] This plurality was connected with a practice described by George Pachymeres, who noted that once a young couple had received their crowns, they were entitled to officials of their own. For example, when Andronikos II and Anna of Hungary became co-emperors of Michael VIII and Theodora Palaiologina, they acquired a small court numbering four officials.[1873] While this very modest establishment is the only one of its kind to be explicitly described in the late Byzantine sources, parallel courts must have been a frequent occurrence since Palaiologan heirs were commonly crowned while their fathers were still living.[1874] With the coronation of Matthew Kantakouzenos and his wife Eirene in 1354, there were actually four imperial courts functioning within the empire as Anna of Savoy, John V and Helene Palaiologina, John VI and Eirene Kantakouzene, and Matthew Kantakouzenos and Eirene Palaiologina presided over courts of their own. While

1871 Yannopoulos (1991), 71.
1872 Herrin (2014), 55 ff.
1873 These officials included *pinkernes*, *epi tes trapezes*, *tatas tes aules* and a *skouterios*. For details, see *Pachymeres* II, 413 f. (IV,29).
1874 Archeological evidence also suggests that each empress residing in Thessalonike had a court of her own. Anastasios Tantsis noted that there were several different palaces in the city, most probably built by or for various members of the imperial family. Tantsis (2014), 79.

this subject requires further investigation, the fact that all of these rulers resided in different cities (not to mention their personal and political differences) makes it unlikely that they would have shared one set of court officials.

The sources also reveal an interesting development in the status of 'parallel empresses' in late Byzantium. In the middle Byzantine period, the senior empress was clearly exalted above her junior colleague(s). An example can be found in *De cerimoniis,* where it is recorded that in the course of the magnificent audience prepared for Princess Olga, Empress Helene was seated on a throne while her daughter-in-law was given a mere chair.[1875] This distinction was to become much less pronounced in the Palaiologan period. Nikephoros Gregoras informs us that during the coronation of John VI and Eirene Kantakouzene, there were three thrones prepared for the empresses at the Blacherns Church as well as at the reception that followed. The hierarchy among the three empresses found expression in the order each assumed in the acclamations (Gregoras and Kantakouzenos both note that the name of Anna of Savoy preceded that of Eirene Kantakouzene[1876]) and in the use of the title *autokratorissa* for the senior empress.

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Even though *Pseudo-Kodinos* offers very little information regarding the ceremonies performed by the late Byzantine empresses, other Palaiologan sources reveal that these women received foreign and local ambassadors, granted audiences to the wives of dignitaries during important ecclesiastical feasts, organized banquets, and presided over a variety of imperial courts. Nevertheless, the overall impression of an empress's ritual role is one of subordination, which is consistent with late Byzantine ideals regarding 'good' women at a time when only a very thin line separated a publicly active woman from slander. From the perspective of the primary sources, no matter how often they joined their husbands on journeys and military ventures, undertook diplomatic missions, or headed the defense of cities, the appropriate place for a pious *augousta* was in the background, inside the palace, and (except for certain ceremonies and unavoidable state affairs) out of sight.

As Lynda Garland very correctly noted,[1877] there is a *caveat*: the nature of the sources is such that it does not offer any information on how the empresses were perceived by the general public of their time. If current public interest in the minute details of the appearances, families, and activities of the female members of contemporary royal families in any way reflects that of the medieval population, then with respect to popularity, the empress may frequently have outshone her husband despite his political and ritual superiority.

1875 *De cerimoniis*, 595 (II,15), *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 595.
1876 *Gregoras* II, 611 f. (XII,12).
1877 While reading this manuscript.

XVIII Power and Public Life

Introduction

Having successfully completed her inauguration rituals, a new empress was ready to assume her duties, including those related to governance. While she shared the quasi-divine *auctoritas* of her husband in theory and could rule the empire in his absence, in practice, her direct involvement was limited, politics being traditionally perceived as the domain of men.[1878] Byzantine women could not become dignitaries, bankers, or judges[1879] and were prohibited from joining the ranks of the clergy.[1880] A ninth-century collection of laws known as the *Basilica* states that "women cannot pronounce judgment and do not utter commands."[1881] These laws reflected the common assumption that women were inherently weak and unable to control their behavior/emotions, making them ill-suited for decision making, administration, and politics.[1882]

Obviously, women could not be completely excluded from public life even though their official participation was limited. As members of the Orthodox Church, they were involved in baptisms, weddings, and funerals as well as weekly services and festivities of the liturgical calendar. Many of the poorer women worked outside their homes as peddlers, farm laborers, or domestic servants to provide for their families. The wealthy and noblewomen (conventionally required to remain secluded in the female quarters of the home, jealously guarded by their male kin) also found their way into the public sphere by becoming involved in religious controversies, through correspondence and meetings with spiritual fathers and scholars, by supporting artists, or by founding monastic communities.

In the middle Byzantine period, three offices of the imperial court were set apart for women. The most important, of course, was that of the empress herself. Next in importance were her servants: the mistress of the robes (*zoste patrikia*)[1883] and the

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1878 See, for example, Barber (1990).

1879 Beaucamp (1996), 25 f. The article offers a detailed and well-presented outline of the legal position of Byzantine women along with references to legal documents. See also Beaucamp (1977). For an interesting observation from the same scholar on the access of fourteenth-century women to the justice of the patriarchal court, see Beaucamp (1998), 141–145.

1880 Beaucamp (2000). For a detailed account of the legal situation of Byzantine women, see Beaucamp (1977). For the legal position of the Byzantine empresses, see also Bosch (1965).

1881 *Basilica*, Series A, I, 49.

1882 Herrin (2001), 7.

1883 For the ritual of investiture of this important female official of the Byzantine court, see *De cerimoniis*, 257 (I,50), see also p. 711 (II, 52). The title was created by Emperor Theophilos for his mother-in-law, Florine-Theoktiste. In the period that followed, it

chamber attendants (*kubikoulariai*). These were often high-ranking noblewomen, who were personally invested by the emperor. Finally, the wives of the court officials and the wives and daughters of the nobles (distinguished by titles derived from those of their husbands) formed a court of women (*sekreton ton gynaikon*), which took part in certain ceremonies. After *zoste patrikia* and *kubikoulariai* disappeared from the sources towards the end of the middle period,[1884] the *sekreton ton gynaikon* and the position of empress remained the only public offices open to women.[1885]

Reflecting the patriarchal character of Byzantine society, the emperor was of primary importance while his wife always took second place, both in politics and in ritual.[1886] In fact, this inferiority was firmly grounded in Byzantine law. A sixth-century collection called the *Digesta* rules that while "an emperor is not subjected to the law, an empress stands under the law."[1887] If there were strong empresses in Byzantium, it was clearly due to their personalities and favorable circumstances and not to the existence of an established right or custom.

No great female autocrats for late Byzantium

The political role of the late Byzantine empresses was significantly influenced by several factors. The most important of these was that the Palaiologan dynasty never ran short of male heirs, which prevented imperial princesses and dowagers from becoming rulers in their own right. Another circumstance concerned the imperial daughters, who were sent abroad to win allies for the waning empire through their marriages. Their absence greatly diminished the pool of noble women from which powerful imperial figures in the style of Anna Komnene or Anna Dalassene, not to mention influential personalities deeply involved in ecclesiastical politics like Eirene-Eulogia and Maria-Martha, the sisters of Michael VIII, could be recruited.

A third circumstance which impacted the political position of the late Byzantine empresses was related to the predilection for foreign brides on the part of the

was occasionally (but not always) bestowed on the mothers of the imperial brides. Herrin (2012), 74 f. *ODB* III, 2231. For the early Byzantine period, Lynda Garland also mentions ladies known as *zostai,* who held rank in their own right. Garland (1999), 5.

1884 She is never mentioned by the late Byzantine narrative sources, nor does she appear in the work of *Pseudo-Kodinos.*

1885 On the public role of the early Byzantine empresses, see James (2001), 59–82.

1886 For interesting observations on family in Byzantium, see Schreiner (1991). For a description of the circumstances of a dowager empress, see Herrin (2000), 28 f. Hill–James–Smythe (1994), 228: "Psellos is unsure how to present these women governors: they were the legal heirs to the empire, the means of renewal; yet as women, for them to be empresses-*regnants* was perceived as a perversion of the natural order."

1887 *Digesta* I,3,31.

emperors. Foreign-born women had been reared in a different environment, language, and culture. Sometimes they were also coping with the trauma of having been prematurely separated from their families. The integration of these women into Byzantine society required a tremendous investment of time and effort. Clearly, the native Byzantine empresses (Theodora Palaiologina, Eirene Kantakouzene, and Helene Palaiologina) were more successful in assuming a number of governmental and political tasks; by contrast, the foreign empresses rarely rose to prominence (with the notable exceptions of Anna of Savoy and, possibly, Eirene-Yolanda). The prevalence of women who had to overcome a number of obstacles simply to become integrated into Palaiologan society and even more to assume an active role in its political life necessarily weakened the overall position of the empress in the late empire.[1888]

The final factor concerns the location of the imperial court.[1889] The Great Palace, which had been the seat of the early and a number of the middle Byzantine rulers, offered the imperial consort spacious apartments of her own,[1890] an arrangement which assured her privacy even as it effectively isolated her from the political life of the empire. In such an environment, an empress who wished to keep abreast of current events needed to find ways to keep her servants close to the emperor. According to contemporary sources,[1891] the number of private rooms in the Blacherns Palace (the location of the late Byzantine imperial court) was limited, forcing the imperial family to live at close quarters. Despite a certain level of discomfort, the less-secluded women's quarters allowed the empresses to remain better acquainted with and more involved in political and ecclesiastical matters.

The authority of Palaiologan empresses also underwent a transformation. Based on the type of power held by Byzantine empresses of the middle period,[1892] Dion Smythe[1893] divided them into three categories: empress-*regnant*, empress-consort, and empress-*manquée*. An empress-*regnant* held direct and sovereign power. An empress-*manquée* had real power; however, there was no legitimate basis for it. An empress-consort (if she was ambitious enough) was able to combine both kinds of authority, exercising power directly, from her position as a legitimate empress, and exercising power indirectly, using her influence with the emperor to affect his political decisions. In the Palaiologan empire, the empress-*regnant* effectively disappeared due to the abundance of male heirs while the empress-*manquée* was obliterated by the exodus of imperial princesses destined to marry foreign princes.

1888 For further details, see Melichar (2016).
1889 For a brief description of imperial residences, see Leszka–Leszka (2017), 28–32.
1890 For details, see Herrin (2016), 8. On the customary separate residence of the empresses, see Grünbart (2016), 47–55.
1891 *Pero Tafur*, 145.
1892 For the role of imperial women in the political life of the empire in the eleventh century, see Hill (1999), 37–71.
1893 Smythe (1997), see especially 144–149.

Only the empress-consort remained. However, she was complemented by the dowager empress (also known to previous periods), who did not remarry and who maintained her influence over public affairs even after the throne had passed to her son. The cases of Anna of Savoy, Helene Palaiologina, and Helene Dragaš provide examples. The fact that the same dynasty remained on the throne for more than two centuries strengthened the long-term impact of Palaiologan dowager empresses.

Empresses and direct rule

Late Byzantine empresses did perform a number of tasks connected with government[1894] and repeatedly wielded direct political power, assuming the official roles of regent, governor, and 'mistress of Thessalonike.' The opportunity to assume these roles had been achieved as the ruler's ability to successfully defend and enlarge the empire through military conquest gradually became subordinate to his blood ties with the previous emperor. As family connections came to represent the basis for legitimacy, an absence of male heirs[1895] occasionally enabled imperial daughters and consorts to ascend to the throne. In the early and middle Byzantine periods, having acquired the right of succession from their fathers/husbands, some women were able to "create" new emperors[1896] through marriage (Ariadne and Zeno), adoption (Zoe the Macedonian and Michael V), or designation (Theodora the Macedonian and Michael VI) when dynasties died out in the male line. However, in the nearly two hundred years of Palaiologan rule, only one emperor died leaving an heir who was still a minor, thereby putting his wife in a position to act as regent.[1897]

In the eighth century, when Leo III gave both parents equal rights over their children,[1898] he enabled widowed mothers to become the legal guardians of their sons.[1899] His law had a profound impact on the politics of the empire in that it allowed dowager empresses to reign until their sons came of age.[1900] Many middle Byzantine empresses ruled as regents, including the notorious Eirene the Athenian, Eudokia Makrembolitissa, Maria of Alania, and Maria of Antioch. Again,

1894 For a general overview, see Leszka–Leszka (2017), 103–114.

1895 See Dagron (2003), 27 f.

1896 See also James (1997), 125. Dagron speaks of an 'obligation' of 'new' emperors to marry into the previous imperial family. Dagron (2003), 40 f. Hill (1999), 41.

1897 See Christofilopoulou (1970), 129–136.

1898 *Novelles*, Novella 27, 104–111.

1899 On such an occasion, as Barbara Hill put it, "once she [the empress] was a mother of children and he [the emperor] was dead, the majestic imperial line was vested in her and because her sons were underage for sole rule." Hill (1999), 66.

1900 Hill (1997), 78: "The ideology of the widowed mother allowed the woman to confront the world in her children's interests. If this included running an empire, then it was her responsibility as a mother and her actions were justified by the needs of the role." See also Hill (1997), 82–91. Runciman (1984), 12.

this scenario can be seen only once during the Palaiologan period: when Anna of Savoy acted as regent for John V. Her government was unusual, however, in that she was supported, or rather controlled, by her advisors (the patriarch, John XIV Kalekas, and the *megas doux,* John Apokaukos) throughout most of her regency.

From the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, the declining fortunes of the empire demanded frequent military operations on the part of the emperor and his army. Military activities combined with the increasing prestige of the Palaiologan dynasty caused the line between private and state affairs to become blurred. Empresses were frequently called on to function as governors (*epitropoi*), ruling Byzantium (in whole or in part) in the absence of their husbands and sons. When necessary, empresses were required to head councils of war, organize the defense of cities, encourage the people to persevere in their resistance, receive embassies, negotiate treaties, and make important decisions concerning international policy. Examples include Eirene-Adelheid, who ruled Didymoteichon after 1321 during the initial stages of the First Civil War, and Anna of Savoy, who was in charge of Constantinople in 1334 and again in 1335, when she successfully countered the attempt of a discontented aristocracy to dethrone her husband. Some years later, Eirene Kantakouzene governed Didymoteichon (1342–1344 and 1345–1346) and held the city until her husband's eventual return. As governor, she also negotiated with the Bulgarian tsar in 1342 and with her husband's Turkish ally, Umur of Aydin. Later, she was in charge of Constantinople when the Latins attacked the city in August 1348 while in March 1353 she prevented her son-in-law, John V, from entering the capital and seizing power. Eirene's daughter Helene ruled the empire when her husband left for the court of the Hungarian king only to be detained by the Bulgarian tsar in Vidin in 1366–1367; she also helped to organize his release.

In addition to the wives who governed for their husbands, there were mothers who governed for their sons. Helene Palaiologina ruled the empire from June 1391 to January 1392 when her son Manuel was forced to participate in a military venture with the Ottoman sultan. Helene Dragaš took over for John VIII while he was at the Council of Ferrara–Florence in 1448–1449.[1901] The reason these emperors preferred to appoint their mothers rather than their wives was probably that the older women held the position of senior empress, possessed greater political experience, and had already proven their loyalty.[1902]

Besides empress-regent and empress-governor, *mistress of Thessalonike*[1903] was yet another way for imperial consorts to play an active role in governance. The office was not created for reasons of state, for the security of the city, or for the

1901 For details, sources, and literature, see the biographical chapters.

1902 The only exception being Andronikos III, who refused to prefer his mother, Maria-Rita, over his wife, Anna of Savoy.

1903 For a study concerning the three empresses who ruled in Thessalonike, see Malamut (2014B).

more effective administration of the western provinces. It was not a ceremonial title. Instead, ruling Thessalonike became a default position, an opportunity for an empress to exercise political influence as well as maintain a degree of independence if she had failed, for some reason, to find her place in the capital. The first empress to govern Thessalonike, Eirene-Yolanda, removed to the city after an unresolved quarrel had resulted in her separation from her husband. Unlike earlier periods, when an empress who had failed to become a model wife would have been repudiated and sent to a convent, Eirene-Yolanda was allowed to resettle in Thessalonike, which she considered her own personal domain since she had brought her husband the title to the city as part of her dowry. Another empress, Maria-Rita, left Constantinople to be closer to her husband while he was organizing the defense of the western territories and ended up spending most of her life in Thessaly, far removed from her political opponents, the Kantakouzene family and their allies. Finally, Anna of Savoy came to Thessalonike in 1351 to dissuade her son from initiating a new round of civil war and chose to remain, creating her own sphere of influence while holding the city for the Palaiologan dynasty. The reigns of these three empresses in Thessalonike, although marked by a certain political independence, were not completely free from the central government in Constantinople. Each of these women acknowledged the empire's claim to Thessalonike, so the transfer of power that occurred after their deaths was always uncomplicated.

Wise adviser, watchful eye, helping hand, and loyal mouthpiece

Throughout the existence of the empire, politically-minded empresses sought to influence the decisions of their husbands in order to impact affairs of state,[1904] maintain peace, support a particular political or religious group in a controversy, or secure the continuation and prosperity of their dynasties. Well-known examples from the early Byzantine period include Theodora, the wife of Justinian, who supported the monophysites, or Sophia, the wife of Justin II, who essentially ruled the empire on behalf of her husband when he was unwell. In the middle period, Eirene Doukaina repeatedly watched over her husband, Alexios I Komnenos, on his military ventures and was heavily involved in charitable activities. As for late Byzantium, John Kantakouzenos noted that when Zeianos and his partisans failed to win him for their conspiracy, they applied to the empress for assistance.[1905] Although Eirene's response was a decisive refusal to support the plot, a later event confirmed that the conspirators knew well what they were doing in contacting the empress. In December 1354, shortly before his

1904 For an interesting study on this kind of influence, see James (2001), 83–100.
1905 *Kantakouzenos* III, 341–345 (IV,47).

abdication, the emperor turned to his wife to discuss this final step in his political career.[1906]

The policies of the late Byzantine empresses, as recorded in the sources, focused primarily on preserving the throne for their husbands, children, or grandchildren. Examples of the first group include Eirene Kantakouzene, who valiantly defended Didymoteichon and thwarted the *coup d'état* attempted by John V in March 1353; Maria of Bulgaria, who allegedly prevented the escape of John V and his younger sons in October 1376; and Helene Palaiologina, who provided Amadeo of Savoy with funds to liberate her husband in 1366. Protecting the interests of her children, Eirene-Yolanda requested independent principalities for her sons and supported their claims in Serbia both financially and politically while Anna of Savoy went so far as to launch a civil war in order to protect her children and her son's claim to the throne after the death of her husband. Occasionally, an empress felt called to protect the interests of her grandchildren, such as when Maria-Rita of Armenia took steps to secure Thessalonike as a seat of government not only for herself but also for her unborn grandchild through her adoption of General Syrgiannes. An empress's political activities could also be motivated by a desire to maintain peace. To this end, Eirene Kantakouzene, Maria-Rita of Armenia, and Anna of Savoy mediated international conflicts as well as conflicts within their own families.[1907]

Another plank in the 'political platform' of the Byzantine empresses was coming to the aid of the persecuted. As Barbara Hill aptly noted, such "interfering with the wheels of justice was a very powerful behavior, although it was characterized by society as female lack of judgement and soft-headedness."[1908] Theodora, the wife of Justinian, protected the monophysites and impoverished women while Eirene Doukaina made a successful plea for the life of Michael Anemas.[1909] In a similar way, Palaiologan empresses effectively intervened on behalf of their family members and subjects. Theodora Palaiologina saved several relatives and servants who had become involved in the anti-Unionist movement from death or mutilation.[1910] Anna of Hungary protected the monks of the Prodromos Monastery on Mount Menoikeion from the secular annexation of their lands[1911] and attempted to shield the persecuted anti-Unionists and Arsenites in Asia Minor.[1912] Helene Palaiologina intervened, along with the emperor, when the reputation of her friend

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1906 *Katankouzenos* III, 305 (IV,41). For further details on the abdication of the imperial couple, see Maksimović (1966), 131–140.

1907 In late Byzantium, a number of noble and imperial women intervened in political and religious conflicts. For a detailed study, see Melichar (2017).

1908 Hill (1996A), 48. Hill (1994), ch. 4.

1909 For middle Byzantine empresses who intervened with the emperor on behalf of the condemned, see Hill (1999), 86.

1910 *Pachymeres* II, 615 f. (VI,24), 621 (VI,25).

1911 *Acts de St. Jean Prodrome*, 46–48, n. 5.

1912 *Pachymeres* IV, 515 (XII,2).

and fellow scholar, Demetrios Kydones, was compromised.[1913] Finally, Helene Dragaš was able to protect those who had rejected a union with the Catholic Church in 1439.[1914]

Late Byzantine empresses often found themselves involved in conflict mediation as well. On six occasions, three imperial consorts were dispatched as ambassadors to reconcile members of the imperial family; in one case, this meant holding negotiations with the wife of the Serbian tsar. Maria-Rita mediated between Andronikos II and her son during the First Civil War.[1915] Anna of Savoy, on behalf of John VI Kantakouzenos, persuaded her son to abandon his plans for a new civil war in 1351[1916] and, in a personal interview with the Serbian tsarina, achieved the withdrawal of the Serbian army from the walls of Thessalonike.[1917] For her part, Eirene Kantakouzene negotiated with her brothers regarding their involvement in the Second Civil War in 1341, persuaded her son to abandon his rebellion in 1347, and negotiated with her son-in-law in the spring of 1352.[1918] Once again, these missions reflect the engagement of empresses in affairs of state; seen from a wider perspective, they also demonstrate the social, political, and cultural involvement of noblewomen in late Byzantine society.[1919]

Empresses also took an active part in international relations when they sent out ambassadors and letters and, on occasion, when they engaged in personal communication with foreign rulers. Anna of Savoy repeatedly corresponded with the pope while acting as regent. She also participated in negotiations with the Serbian tsarina in 1351, with Venice (seeking money for her military ventures during the Second Civil War), with the tsars of Serbia and Bulgaria, and with Turkish rulers (1341–1346). Because they did not often have an opportunity to exercise direct rule over the empire, other late Byzantine empresses seldom entered into negotiations of this kind; however, evidence of their involvement in international relations exists. Examples include Maria-Rita's helping her son to strike an alliance with the Bulgarian tsar, Michael Šišman,[1920] and subsequently assisting the two rulers in reaching a compromise.[1921] It is also possible that she carried out a religious-political mission in the Kingdom of Lesser Armenia. Another empress,

1913 *Camelli, Kydones*, 69. Kianka (1996), 163 f.

1914 For details, see Marjanović-Dušanić (2014), 125.

1915 *Kantakouzenos* I, 166 f. (I,34). *Gregoras* I, 358 f. (VIII,11) *Van Dieten*, II/1, 168 f., no. 130.

1916 Nicol (1996), 92. Nicol (1972B), 244 f. Failler (1973), 78. Muratore (1906), 232 f. *Gregoras* III, 149 (XXVII,28), 169 (XXVII, 51 f.). *Kantakouzenos* III, 200–204 (I,41).

1917 *Kantakouzenos* III, 208 (IV,27).

1918 *Gregoras* III, 144 (XXVII,22), 152–171(XXVII, 31–54).

1919 For a detailed analysis of these missions, see Melichar (2017).

1920 *Van Dieten* II/1, 192–194, fn. 192. *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 78, 8, 18. *Kantakouzenos* I, 207 f. (I,42).

1921 *Gregoras* I, 431 (IX,8). Compare with *Kantakouzenos* I, 327 f. (II,3) *Kantakouzenos* I, 325 (II,3). *Dölger, Regesten* IV, 136 f., n. 2722.

Eirene Kantakouzene, was involved in negotiations with the Bulgarian tsar as well as with representatives of Galata. Finally, Helene Dragaš carried out negotiations with Sultan Murad II in 1424.

As part of her political duties, the empress was also responsible for overseeing the education of her children and training her successor (whom she often brought up in the palace with her own children). On one occasion, George Sphrantzes describes Empress Helene Dragaš and her daughter-in-law, Empress Sophia, employed in the vestry.[1922] The text offers no details regarding their occupation but suggests that the younger empress was learning by observing the elder perform her duties. Imperial consorts may have had other charges in addition to their offspring and successors. John Kantakouzenos noted that "Byzantine emperors (. . .) brought girls of exceptional beauty not only from aristocratic families but also of obscure origin into the palace so that they, when necessary, could be married to the Skyth [Russian] satraps."[1923] While Kantakouzenos did not explicitly mention a connection, the fact that these girls were brought up in the palace suggests that they became part of the extended imperial household and would have been supervised to some extent by the empress.

Administrators

Palaiologan empresses administered not only the private domains they had inherited from their parents or received from their husbands (thanks, in part, to the management skills of trusted servants)[1924] but also entire cities and regions of the empire, assuming the roles of administrator, governor, mediator, judge, and patron. Chanceries, sometimes headed by important personalities,[1925] enabled imperial consorts to more effectively discharge the duties of their office. While studying the documents issued by empresses, Barišić realized their significance and concluded that

> the orders of empresses were always, when quoted, accompanied by the same expressions of respect as the charters of the emperors. (. . .) Rulers referred to orders given previously by empresses treating and confirming them in the same manner as the deeds of their predecessors on the throne. (. . .) the decrees of the Byzantine empresses belonged among public legal documents, which had to be respected by imperial officials in the same way as those of the emperors themselves, their co-emperors or despots.[1926]

1922 *Sphrantzes*, 28 (XIII,4). The location of the vestry is not further specified.
1923 *Kantakouzenos* I, 188 (I,39).
1924 Barišić (1971), 146.
1925 During the initial years of her reign, Eirene-Yolanda's chancery in Thessalonike was headed by Theodore Metochites.
1926 Barišić (1971), 202.

Although the quality of the writing materials and the style of the documents signed by the empresses are identical to those issued by their spouses, extant orders and privileges known to have originated with empresses are not *chrysobulls* (*chrysoboulla*), the most important imperial documents, but only *horismoi* (decrees of lesser rank). The emperor signed his documents in red ink, but the *menologem* (signature) of the empress was written in black. Her documents were sealed with wax, exceptionally lead, seals. The decrees published by the late Byzantine empresses, which clearly seek to emulate the documents published by Theodora Palaiologina,[1927] correspond to a number of the needs of the local population and monastic communities, including the investigation and confirmation of private possessions,[1928] donations to monasteries,[1929] exemptions (of monasteries) from taxes,[1930] building permits,[1931] and the inaugurations of monastic officials.[1932]

Empresses corroborated their orders with seals that bore on their obverse the image of the Virgin Platytera with the Christ child on her lap.[1933] The reverse depicted the empress standing facing the viewer, wearing a high crown with pendants, a wide-sleeved *divitision*, and a *loros*. She held a *baion* in her right hand, and the left hand was raised before her chest in supplication. This model for a seal was originally created for Anna-Constance, the wife of John III Batatzes of Nicea, who exchanged the image of Christ on the obverse (used by the Komnenian empresses Eirene Doukaina and Eirene-Piroška and possibly others) for the seated image of the Mother of God subsequently adopted by Palaiologan imperial consorts.[1934] The inscription surrounding the image of the empress included her name and title. To mention at least one example, the seal of Helene Dragaš carried the inscription "Helene in Christ the God pious *augousta* and *autokratorissa* of the

1927 Barišić (1971), 201.
1928 *Actes de Chilandar*, n. 67. For the argumentation that this *horismos* was originally published by Eirene and not by Andronikos III, see Barišić (1971), 175–179.
1929 *Actes de Kutlumus*, n. 11, 60–64, ls. 25–26. Barišić (1971), 161 f.
1930 *Actes de St. Jean Prodrome*, 54, n. 26.
1931 *Actes de Chilandar*, 68. For details on this document, see Barišić (1971), 166–170. For Barišić's argument for August 1321, see Barišić (1971), 167–170.
1932 *MM* II, 388 f., n. 573. *Darrouzès, Regestes* VI, 374 f., n. 3131.
1933 On a rare example of a seal bearing the image (most probably) of Anna of Savoy, the enthroned Virgin carries a medallion with the Christ child. Schlumberger (1900), 180. Thomasso Bertelè describes two similar seals reputed to have belonged to an Anna Palaiologina, one from a private collection and one preserved in the Museum of Plovdiv (See Bertelè (1937), 67–69, see also the image on p. 69. A similar image and inscription, this time on a lead seal, is reported by Zacos and Veglery (Zacos–Veglery (1972), I, 124, n. 127.) For empresses, seals, and coins in early Byzantium, see James (2001), 101–132. For images of empresses on seals, see also http://www.doaks.org/resources/online-exhibits/gods-regents-on-earth-a-thousand-years-of-byzantine-imperial-seals (retrieved October 4, 2018).
1934 Seibt (1987), 117.

Romans, Palaiologina."[1935]While the basic design was the same, the seals evince minor differences. Theodora Palaiologina carries a cruciform scepter[1936] while later empresses hold a scepter with a jeweled top.[1937] Additionally, the clothing of the empresses varies: Eirene-Yolanda, for example, wears a dress with two vertical rows of pellets enclosed in squares.[1938] On the lead seal preserved in Dumbarton Oaks, Theodora Palaiologina wears a richly decorated loros over a robe without design.[1939] These variations reveal that while the basic pattern remained the same, each new type of seal was carefully prepared with an attention to detail that went beyond a mere alteration of name and title.

In early Byzantium, empresses often appeared on coins. Typically, the profile bust of the female ruler was depicted on the obverse and a standing personification, such as security, victory, or salvation, graced the reverse.[1940] In the middle Byzantine period, several empresses appeared on coins as well. At first, these coins mostly showed a bust of the empress (Eirene the Athenian, Theodora the wife of Theophilos, Eudokia Ingerina). Later coinage depicts the entire figure of the empress, often along with her husband or co-ruler (e.g., Zoe and Theodora the Macedonians or Eudokia Makrembolitissa). Although currency issuance was an essential component of administration, the images of the late Byzantine empresses are missing from the preserved coinage. The exception is Anna of Savoy, who minted coins bearing her likeness both as empress-regent in Constantinople and as ruler of Thessalonike. [1941]On these coins (discussed in greater detail in the biographical chapter on Anna), the empress is usually shown standing with a scepter in her right hand[1942] and, on the coins minted during her time in Thessalonike, a model of the city in her left. She is often accompanied by John V, the Theotokos,[1943] Christ, or important military saints. As mentioned in her biographical chapter, Eirene Gattilusio may have appeared along with her son on a coin minted by her husband during his reign in Thessalonike.[1944]

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In 1955, Vitalien Laurent observed that the Palaiologan empresses played an important role in the political life of the late empire and called for a more detailed study of their activities.[1945] The biographies of the late Byzantine empresses show

1935 Pančenko (1908), 106 f.
1936 Zacos–Veglery (1972), 114, n. 122.
1937 See, for example, the seal of Eirene-Yolanda: Zacos–Veglery (1972),120, n. 125.
1938 Zacos–Veglery (1972), I/I, n. 125, 121 f.
1939 See the image Ill. 1 in the biographical chapter on the empress.
1940 For details, see James (2001), 105–115. Mc Clanan (2002), 26 f.
1941 James (2001), 114, Plate 16.
1942 For a detailed study of the coins, their images, and interpretations, see Bertelè (1937).
1943 Bendall–Donald (1979), 132–135, ns. 1–5.
1944 Gerasimov (1956), 116.
1945 Laurent (1955), 135, fn. 1.

that their participation in government was of a different character than that of their predecessors in that, in general, they did not acquire supreme power and were never called upon to "create" new emperors to continue the dynasty. The comparatively long lifespans of the Palaiologan emperors coupled with a sufficiency of male heirs in the direct or parallel line constituted the driving force behind this change and effectively prevented wives, daughters, and mothers of emperors from coming to the fore and assuming direct rule. At the same time, late Byzantine empresses were denied a carefree existence in the female quarters of the palace. Due to the diminishing fortunes of Palaiologan Byzantium and frequent conflicts within the imperial family, empresses were often called into public service and required to govern and defend the empire in the absence of husbands and sons, act as mediators within the family to secure peace, and perform various administrative tasks in the cities and regions under their care. Political influence and activity, traditionally only grudgingly tolerated in Byzantine female rulers, were thus finally available to the Palaiologan empresses – but only in the hour of need and by default.

XIX Piety and Orthodoxy

(…) We beseech you, Master of all things,
preserve her [the empress] under your protection;
fortify her reign; let her always do what is pleasing
to you.
Support her days with justice and plentiful peace
so that (…) we may lead quiet and tranquil lives in all
piety and modesty.
For you are the Ruler of peace and the Savior of our souls,
and to you we give glory – to the Father and to the Son
and to [the Holy Spirit].

A prayer recited by the patriarch over the middle Byzantine empresses following their coronations.[1946]

Introduction

Although Byzantine empresses did not play a role in the liturgy, their relationship with the Orthodox Church had a very real impact on the successful discharge of their public duties, on the development of their pious images, and sometimes on their private lives as well. Throughout the centuries, female members of Byzantine imperial families took monastic vows, founded and materially supported monasteries and churches, formulated rules for their monastic foundations, engaged in charitable pursuits, and took sides in ecclesiastical controversies. To build their reputations and confirm their Orthodoxy – as well as to ensure a source of support in critical situations – empresses also cultivated close contacts with representatives of the church. In the complex circumstances of the late empire, Palaiologan empresses attempted to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors, but their position was precarious. The clergy was watching closely for anything that hinted at support for a union with the Catholic Church or opposition to the Palamite teaching as well as for failure to follow Orthodox practices. At the same time, there was little money available for large-scale charitable projects that could help an empress establish and maintain a reputation for piety.

1946 For the edited text, see Arranz (1990), 97. Translation mine.

The *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*: the measuring rod of piety

The inauguration of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire led to the rapid spread of Christian doctrine and the hierarchization of the church. Versed in the teachings of the Holy Writ, bishops were called on to make decisions regarding theological matters and to protect the faith from impious and heretical practices. Judging the devotion of the flock gradually became the duty and privilege of the church leadership, who eventually acquired the power to extol saints and excommunicate sinners. Admittedly, the sole objective of those exercising this privilege was not always to persuade the erring to mend their ways; personal bias and political agendas continually threatened to creep into the process. Emperors feared the repercussions the patriarch could impose, and not even their wives escaped the evaluation and criticism of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Members of the Byzantine imperial family were not typically candidates for sainthood; in fact, empresses could mostly become saints only if they used their political power to uphold Orthodoxy in some extraordinary way.[1947] Examples include the famous champions of icon veneration, St. Eirene the Athenian and St. Theodora, the wife of Theophilos, who reversed the iconoclast doctrine favored by their husbands.[1948] In late Byzantium, empresses only rarely had the opportunity to be of real help to the Orthodox cause. Most Palaiologan imperial consorts were of foreign origin, brought up Catholic and often with little influence over or interest in public affairs. Although they were frequently described as 'holy' (*hagia*) in the texts (and depicted with haloes in images), none of the late Byzantine empresses actually achieved sainthood. The two who came closest to making a significant contribution to Orthodoxy were also guilty of a previous association with the 'wrong' side in an ecclesiastical controversy. Theodora Palaiologina, who supported Andronikos II when he cancelled the Union of Lyons in 1283, had not actively opposed the Union while her husband was still alive. She made amends for this by publicly rejecting the Lyons agreement and condemning Michael VIII, the one responsible for initiating it, but her chances for acquiring a halo had been ruined all the same. The other potential candidate for sainthood was Anna of Savoy, who contributed to the official inclusion of the hesychast teachings in Orthodox doctrine during her regency. The fact that she had previously backed the opposition was generally known, however, so she could not pass for a true defender of the faith. Her timely change of sides did not suffice for her inclusion among the Orthodox saints even though it did earn her extended praise in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* (hereafter *Synodikon*).[1949] This document was an important measuring

1947 For Western medieval queens defending their faith, see Thiellet (2004), 356–362. On princesses and sainthood in the Orthodox and Catholic churches in the high and late Middle Ages, see Melicharová (2007).

1948 Talbot (1998), 4 f.

1949 The following passage summarizes my article, which describes individual omissions in detail. For further information, see Melichar (2017A).

rod of the piety required of empresses by the Orthodox Church and, as such, will be discussed in detail in the paragraphs that follow.

Besides listing dangerous heretics and heresies, the *Synodikon* records the names of faithful emperors, empresses, patriarchs, martyrs, and confessors. Although the names of empresses who had lived a pious life and died in Orthodoxy were normally inscribed there, a glance at the relevant passage reveals that maintaining a pious reputation was a delicate undertaking in late Byzantium as only nine of the fifteen imperial consorts earned a place on the list:

> Theodora, who assuming the divine and angelic dress became the nun Eugenia, eternal be her memory. Eirene (. . .) Eirene (. . .) Maria our (. . .) lady, who assuming the divine and angelic dress became the nun Xene (. . .) Anna (. . .) our lady, who assuming the divine and angelic dress became the nun Anastasia, who by her actions and words fought throughout her life and with all her soul to confirm the ecclesiastical teachings of the Apostles and the Church Fathers and to exterminate the evil and godless heresies of Barlaam and Akindynos and their partisans (. . .) Eirene, our (. . .) lady, who assuming the divine and angelic dress became the nun Eugenia (. . .) Anna (. . .) Helene our (. . .) lady, who assuming the divine and angelic dress became the nun Hypomone (. . .) Maria our (. . .) lady, who assuming the divine and angelic dress became the nun Makaria, eternal be her memory.

Although no surnames are included, it is not difficult to identify the nine empresses, listed chronologically according to the year of death. The passage opens with the name of Theodora, the wife of Michael VIII (d. 1303), followed by Eirene-Yolanda of Montferrat (d. 1317), Eirene-Adelheid (d. 1324), and Maria-Rita (d. 1333). The Anna who secured so prominent a place among the late Byzantine empresses is clearly Anna of Savoy (d. 1365), the successful advocate of the Palamite doctrine. The *Synodikon* also commemorates Eirene Kantakouzene (d. between 1363 and 1379), her daughter Helene Palaiologina (d. 1397), and Anna of Moscow (d. 1417). The list of pious empresses closes somewhat unexpectedly with Maria of Bulgaria (d. 1400). The names of the remaining six empresses, Anna of Hungary (d. 1281), Eirene Palaiologina (d. between 1357 and 1361), Sophia of Montferrat (d. 1434), Maria of Trebizond (d. 1439), Eirene Gattilusio (d. 1440), and Helene Dragaš (d. 1450), were all omitted.

These omissions cannot be ascribed to carelessness on the part of the patriarchal scribes but rather to concern on the part of the clergy lest Orthodox teaching be infiltrated by heresy. The most basic requirement for an empress was her adherence to Orthodoxy, and it was highly advisable for future Byzantine empresses who had not grown up in the Orthodox Church to convert to Orthodoxy upon their arrival in the empire. Based on the prescriptions of the 95th Canon of the Quinisext Council (692), these women were required to abjure their errors and profess the true faith.[1950] As an empress was expected to participate in religious

1950 For details, see Stavrou (2016), 208.

rituals alongside her husband, the conversion of the non-native, non-Orthodox princess was crucial to her integration into Byzantine society,[1951] and it is not surprising that the name of the only empress to keep her original confession, Sophia of Montferrat, was never inscribed into the *Synodikon*.[1952]

Any association with a union with the Catholic Church was another dangerous misstep, one that proved fatal to the pious reputations of several of the late Byzantine empresses. George Pachymeres points out that Anna of Hungary does not appear in the *Synodikon* due to her connection with the Union of Lyons (1274).[1953] An early death robbed her of the chance to repent of her (tacit) approval of the Union, and she was not buried with the appropriate (read: non-Unionist) rites; therefore, she clearly could not be included among the Orthodox empresses.[1954]

The exclusion of Eirene Gattilusio from the list is probably connected with a union as well, this time the Union of Florence (1349).[1955] It does not seem likely that her name was overlooked for political reasons because her husband remained a crowned emperor until his death in 1408, after which his name was duly included in the *Synodikon*. The widowed Eirene became a nun, returned to Constantinople, and spent the remainder of her life at peace with the imperial family. The only explanation for her omission from the list, other than extreme negligence on the part of the Orthodox clergy, is that she died under the Union of Florence, which was not cancelled until the Council of Constantinople in 1484.[1956] Eirene, who died in 1440, did not have an opportunity to repent of her association with this latest union, and her memory, like that of Anna of Hungary, fell victim to unfavorable timing.

The Union of Florence is apparently the reason why yet another empress, Helene Dragaš, is missing from the annual reading of the *Synodikon*.[1957] Recognizing the critical political situation of the empire and despite serious reservations on her part, the empress chose to support her son John VIII throughout his union-related negotiations. Later, she also supported the pro-Western policy of another son, Constantine XI, a policy which stained the memory of them both. As a consequence of his political decisions, the list of pious emperors closes not with the name of the emperor-martyr Constantine XI, who died on the battlements of Constantinople in a vain defense of the city against the Turks in 1453, but with that of his father, Manuel II. The absence of Constantine, whose death could hardly have been overlooked by the Orthodox clergy, points to the Union of Florence as the most probable reason for the omission of the name of his devout mother.

1951 For details on conversion, see the chapter on becoming an empress in Byzantium.
1952 Melichar (2017A), 181 ff.
1953 *PLP*, n. 21348. Moravcsik (1958), II, 70. See also Melichar (2017A), 184 f.
1954 *Pachymeres* IV, 515 (XII,2).
1955 Melichar (2017A), 187.
1956 Stavrou (2016), 211.
1957 Melichar (2017A), 187 f.

Although Jacques Gouillard, the editor of the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, concluded that the list of empresses closes with the name of Maria of Trebizond,[1958] the wife of John VIII, there are compelling reasons to believe that the final name is actually that of Maria of Bulgaria, the wife of Andronikos IV. There would have been ample grounds for omitting Andronikos from the *Synodikon,* for he repeatedly rebelled against his father in a series of bids for the throne (1372–1385). Despite this unruly conduct and the fact that he had been officially disinherited by his father, Andronikos IV can be found on the list of devout emperors. There is no reason why his wife should not appear in the *Synodikon* as well. An inscription in a Gospel Book that Maria presented to the Catholic metropolitan Peter Philargos during her stay in the West in 1390[1959] clearly testifies that the widowed empress became an Orthodox nun and assumed the monastic name Makaria.

By contrast, no source confirms that Maria of Trebizond ever became a nun – except for that final, ambiguous line in the list in the *Synodikon.* All other references mention her only as "empress," and even in joint references with her husband, she is merely described as "*augousta* Maria" and not by a monastic name. Considering the high honor accorded the monastic estate by Byzantine society, the clerics in charge of inscribing the names of the pious would have been certain to include hers (just as the monastic names of all the other empresses are duly included). Although she does not figure in the list of pious imperial consorts, Maria of Trebizond was not completely excluded but appears in a separate entry dedicated to her husband sometime after his death in 1448, apparently the last addition made to the *Synodikon.*[1960] Even here, however, she is mentioned merely as "Empress Maria" and not as the nun Makaria.

Besides refusing to convert to Orthodoxy or being associated with a union of the Catholic and Orthodox churches, a third danger to the commemoration of an empress was the failure of her husband to maintain power. The absence of the name of Eirene Palaiologina from the *Synodikon* is probably a consequence of the political competition between the Palaiologan and the Kantakouzene families.[1961] When Eirene's husband, Matthew Kantakouzenos, abdicated in 1357, the imperial couple not only lost privileges in this life but was also deprived of the right to have their names appear in the *Synodikon* after their deaths.

Interestingly, while (ecclesiastical) politics was paramount in deciding whether a late Byzantine empress would appear in the *Synodikon*, her exact political status was of lesser significance. Even though Eirene Palaiologina, Sophia of Montferrat, Maria of Trebizond, and Eirene Gattilusio were crowned empresses, they do not figure on the list. On the other hand, the *Synodikon* mentions Eirene-Adelheid of Braunschweig-Grubenhagen and Anna of Moscow, who were married to imperial

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1958 *Gouillard, Synodikon*, 102, fn. 347. See also Melichar (2017A), 185 f.
1959 Lappa-Zizicas (1976), 139 ff. See also Sophronios Eustratiades (1911), 273 f.
1960 *Gouillard, Synodikon*, 95, ls. 777 f.
1961 Melichar (2017A), 185.

heirs but never crowned. Similarly, the traditionally accepted aspects of piety (such as adherence to the monastic estate) were apparently of secondary importance. The fact that Eirene Gattilusio and Helene Dragaš became nuns did not earn them a place on the list. At the same time, none of the empresses mentioned in the *Synodikon*, with the exception of Theodora Palaiologina, performed noteworthy acts of charity,[1962] but their pious images were obviously untarnished. In this sense, the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* systematically placed loyalty to the Orthodox Church and political success above the personal virtue and practical piety of the late Byzantine empresses.

Impoverished or indifferent? Late Byzantine empresses and their foundations

Throughout the centuries, Byzantine empresses were frequently involved in founding monasteries, nunneries, and churches.[1963] These pious endeavors were not merely investment opportunities; they also offered imperial women a chance to prepare a place to spend their widowhood.[1964] Moreover, founding such institutions gave the empresses an opportunity to bolster their public image by "[making] a legitimate public statement and civic display of [their] piety and, consequently, of [their] wealth and standing."[1965] Early Byzantine empresses, such as Eudoxia, Eudokia, Pulcheria or Theodora the wife of Theophilos, are known to have provided materially for the poor: they built and supported hospitals as well as residences for foreigners and the elderly.[1966] In the middle Byzantine period, empresses continued to be involved in charitable activities, the obvious examples being Eirene Doukaina, who requested mercy for the condemned[1967] and founded the Kecharitomene Nunnery, and her successor, Eirene-Piroška, who co-founded the Pantokrator.[1968] After the reign of John II, however, there were no more great empresses-founders in the Komnenos line as John expressly forbade members of the imperial family to engage in such activities.[1969]

1962 Byzantine sources do not mention Palaiologan empresses serving the poor in the style of Western princesses and queens. For direct charity in the West, see, for example, Thiellet (2004), 145–154. See also Melicharová (2007), 337–343.

1963 Constantelos (1991), 90. For empresses and patronage in early Byzantium, see James (2001), 148–163. Dimitropoulou (2007), 95.

1964 For studies on imperial foundresses, see James (2004).

1965 James (2004), 52.

1966 James (2011–2012), 65.

1967 *Anna Komnene* I, 375 (XII, 6). For Western princesses helping prisoners and the condemned, see Thiellet (2004), 284 f.

1968 On the patronage of Komnenian empresses, see Hill (1999), 153–180. On the foundation activities of Western queens, see Thiellet (2004), 258–278.

1969 Hill (1999), 176.

Although Kidonopoulos[1970] mentions several convents built and reconstructed by late Byzantine noblewomen, Palaiologan empresses did not participate in these efforts in a prominent way. Not a single empress could boast of having founded a new monastic institution, and only Theodora Palaiologina financed the building of a church (as well as restoring two convents and a hospital). Though her restorations were extensive and served as important centers of commemoration for the imperial family, they were not followed by further projects of a similar nature. This curious lack of imperial support for monastic communities in the late empire is partly explained by Angeliki Laiou, who states that "one of the most important characteristics of the Palaiologan period is the existence of an aristocracy whose social, political, and economic role increased as the power and influence of the imperial court and the capital declined."[1971] The sources name a number of aristocratic founders, often related to the imperial family, including Theodora Synadene, who founded the Nunnery of Bebaia Elpis; Maria-Martha Palaiologina, who sponsored Kyra Martha; Eirene-Eulogia Palaiologina Choumnaina, who established the Christ Philanthropos-Soter double monastery and Theodora Raoulaina, who financed the Nunnery of St. Andrew in Krisei. Their combined achievements in this area vastly outweigh those of the single empress to become involved in the re-foundation of monastic houses, Theodora Palaiologina.

While some late Byzantine empresses may not have been interested in such endeavors, others must have found their desire to act undercut by a lack of finances,[1972] frequent civil wars, or family strife. Gone were the days when empresses commanded large fortunes that they could distribute according to their own designs, building palaces as well as charitable institutions.[1973] To provide relief for the indigent community residing in her Monastery of Bassos, Maria of Bulgaria was forced to bestow the foundation on one of her courtiers under the condition that he, in return, would bequeath his own private fortune to prevent the monastery from falling into disrepair.[1974] Anna of Savoy, who as regent had direct access to the imperial treasury, sponsored building and repairs in Hagia Sophia.[1975] Most of the other empresses, as is evident from the biographical chapters, expressed their support for monastic institutions through donations of smaller landed properties and a few precious objects.

According to the customs of the late Byzantine court, empresses did not personally serve the destitute[1976] and orphans like the queens and noblewomen of

1970 Kidonopoulos (1994).

1971 Laiou (1973), 131.

1972 On the importance of financial resources for empresses' philanthropy, see Hill (1999), 87.

1973 Garland (1999), 6.

1974 For details on the monastery, see Janin (1969), III, 44–46, 61 f.

1975 *Kantakouzenos* III, 30 (IV,4). *Mioni, Cronaca inedita*, 74, n. 12. See also *ibid.*, 80, n. 12.

1976 Such pious activities were also rare among the Byzantine aristocracy. See also Stethakopoulos (2011–2012), 392, and esp. 396 f. Thiellet (2004), 139–154.

the West[1977] but provided financial aid instead. However, little is known about the charity of the Palaiologan empresses, doubtless due to their limited resources.[1978] Theodora's hospital, attached to Lips,[1979] treated and fed twelve female patients free of charge while the convent accepted nuns bringing no money to the community,[1980] nuns from other convents[1981] (presumably refugees from Asia Minor), and nuns from foundations that had become unable to support their inhabitants due to loss of land. On the feasts of the patron saints of the Convent of Lips, the Theotokos (September 8) and St. John the Baptist (June 24), the empress ordered the distribution of bread and money at the gate of the convent.[1982] In order to finance these charitable activities, Theodora Palaiologina, her mother Eudokia, and her son Andronikos II sacrificed a private fortune, which included properties in and around the capital and near Smyrna:

> The detailed lists include villages (including one in Macedonia), farms, vineyards, olive groves, mills, gardens, a cattle byre, a fishpond and rental properties, with even the number of olive trees itemised. Several of the estates and houses in Constantinople are specifically said to have been purchased by the empress herself. Certain revenues are dedicated to the upkeep of the women's hospital (. . .).[1983]

The substantial donation of Theodora and her family provides a marked contrast to the modest nature of the charitable deeds attributed to a later empress, Maria of Bulgaria (to mention at least one example), who provided a dowry for an impoverished Constantinopolitan bride and mediated a reduction of rent for a monk who had fallen on hard times.[1984]

There was certainly disparity among the individual financial situations of the late Byzantine empresses. Theodora Palaiologina was the only child of a very wealthy family and, as such, received large landed possessions that provided her with a stable source of income. Little specific information has been uncovered regarding the finances of the other empresses. Those who were born in Byzantium probably received valuable objects as well as landed possessions while foreign-born princesses, such as Maria-Rita and Anna of Savoy, arrived in the empire with luxury items and money. Nevertheless, such finite means could not cover the needs

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1977 For a comparison of the pious activities of Western and Eastern princesses, see Melicharová (2007).
1978 For the charity of the holy princesses of the West, see Thiellet (2004), 139–154. The author observes that, beginning in the eleventh century, Western queens also progressively lost control of their incomes (p. 140).
1979 *Delehaye, Typica*, 134, (XX,50). *BMFD*, 1281 (XX,50). Talbot (1994), 106–109, 116 f.
1980 *Delehaye, Typica*, 114, (VII,14). *BMFD*, 1269 (VII,14).
1981 *Delehaye, Typica*, 117, (IX,20). *BMFD*, 1271 (IX,20).
1982 *Delehaye, Typica*, 127, (XV,38). *BMFD*, 1277 (XV,38).
1983 Garland (2013), 51. For complete information, see *Delehaye, Typica*, 131–134 (XLIV–IL,38).
1984 *Darrouzès, Regestes* VI, 364 f., n. 3116.

of an empress's household for long, not to mention their inadequacy for funding large-scale charitable projects. This meant that the foreign-born imperial consorts especially were dependent on the generosity of their husbands to supply their material needs; however, the size of the endowments the emperors could bestow gradually diminished with the progressive impoverishment of the empire.

The ideologies and material circumstances of the late empire also played a role in some empresses' lack of philanthropic enterprise. Following the devastating Second Civil War, Eirene Kantakouzene and her daughter Helene, members of an aristocratic family that had once been very wealthy but whose fortunes were depleted in the course of the war, probably subscribed to the opinion voiced by John VI Kantakouzenos that gifts should be offered to the government to rebuild and defend the Byzantine state rather than to monastic houses to provide for their welfare.[1985] Whatever their reasons, the inability or unwillingness of Palaiologan empresses to participate in foundation decreased their visibility in the public eye and had a negative impact on the general perception of the empress as a pious and powerful figure.

Over time, by limiting (or having limits imposed on) their charitable activities, the late Byzantine empresses lost the ability to demonstrate their support for the poor and for the Orthodox Church. Especially for the foreign-born empresses, a visible statement of their compassion and regard might have conclusively proved their love for their subjects as well as their Orthodoxy in the eyes of both the common people and the clergy and could have furthered their integration into Byzantine society. Without these opportunities, it was only with great difficulty that they could win the affection of their subjects and persuade the church of the sincerity of their conversions.

Empress-nuns in late Byzantium

Lacking the financial means to demonstrate their piety in a tangible way, Palaiologan empresses were left with only one option for making a public statement regarding their devotion to Orthodoxy. While imperial widows of the middle Byzantine period, such as Eudokia Makrembolitissa or Maria of Alania, sometimes remarried to secure their positions and protect the rights of their young children, this practice vanished in the final years of the empire. By the time the Palaiologan empresses had lost their husbands, their children were already grown. Free from their responsibility to the dynasty, these women chose the veil over remarriage. Of the fifteen empresses described in this study, six predeceased their husbands and nine took monastic vows (seven after the death of their husbands and two, Eirene

1985 *Kantakouzenos* II, 61 f. (III,8). A similar veto on foundations was issued by Manuel I Komnenos, whose wives likewise dedicated only smaller objects to extant monasteries. For details, see Hill (1999), 175.

Kantakouzene and Sophia of Montferrat, after separating from their husbands).[1986] Their unanimous choice reflects the greater solemnity of the late Byzantine court. By becoming nuns, these empresses may have hoped to strengthen the pious reputations they could not promote through sizeable donations or foundation activities.[1987] Unlike previous periods in which empresses were sometimes forced to enter a convent (e.g., Zoe the Macedonian, Zoe Karbonopsina, or Theophano, wife of Leo VI), late Byzantine empresses seem to have arrived at their decisions without external pressure.[1988]

The narrative sources never explicitly describe the rituals connected with an empress's taking the veil in the Palaiologan era; however, the ceremony can be partially reconstructed from the external evidence. The usual practice for Byzantine women was as follows: after a period of novitiate, they took their vows in a monastic context in the course of a special ceremony called tonsure,[1989] which was performed by a priest-monk and witnessed by the resident monastic community. Interestingly, the sources do not mention any of the late Byzantine empresses having taken their vows in a convent. While the silence of the sources does not preclude a traditional venue (at least in some of the less well-documented cases), considering their frequent moves, governmental duties, and complex family circumstances, several if not the majority of the late Byzantine empress-nuns apparently took their vows in their private apartments in ceremonies attended by their closest attendants and family members. A private ceremony was very likely in the case of Theodora Palaiologina, for instance, who apparently became a nun shortly before her death. Another example involves Eirene Kantakouzene, who removed her imperial robe and took the veil in the palace prior to her move to the Convent of Kyra Martha.[1990]

This private ritual evidently comprised several elements. To begin her transformation, the empress set aside her crown and scepter. Her attendants then removed the imperial robe and slippers and dressed her in the solemn, black habit of a nun. This part of the ceremony can be observed in the story of Simonis Palaiologina, the daughter of Andronikos II and Eirene-Yolanda. Unwilling to return to Serbia to the husband she feared, Simonis decided to become a nun rather than leave Byzantium again. On the way to Serbia in 1317/8, she divested herself of her imperial dress

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1986 For saintly queens of the Middle Ages taking monastic vows in the West, see Thiellet (2004), 247–302.

1987 According to Liz James, early Byzantine empresses "gained (. . .) a reputation for piety, virtue and orthodoxy" thanks to their building initiative. James (2001), 152.

1988 For the reasons that led late Byzantine women to enter convents, see Talbot (1985). For a comparison of the monastic experiences of men and women, see Talbot (1985A). For statistics on empresses and imperial women entering monastic institutions, see Papadimitriou (1991).

1989 In course of this ceremony part of the candidate's hair was cut.

1990 *Kantakouzenos* III, 106 (IV,16). *Gregoras* III, 243 f. (XXIX,30). *Kantakouzenos* III, 307 (IV,42).

and donned a monastic robe in a plea to be allowed to remain in her home country, a plea that went unheard.[1991] A change of clothing also figures prominently in a poem dedicated to Manuel II and Helene Dragaš by Gemisthos Plethon, who juxtaposed the secular and the monastic dress of the imperial couple as symbols of their worldly and monastic lives.[1992]

A second element of the ritual would have been a declaration of faith. When George Sphrantzes and his wife took their monastic vows, they recited the *Creed* in full and expressly denounced various heresies.[1993] Naturally, even a private ceremony would have been facilitated by a priest or spiritual father, who could pray over the new nun and perform the tonsure[1994] just as Theoleptos, the metropolitan of Philadelphia, cut off the golden tresses of Eirene Choumnaina, the daughter-in-law of Andronikos II, prior to her entering her foundation of Christ Philanthropos.[1995]

On taking the veil, each empress adopted a new name that began with the same letter as her baptismal (or received[1996]) name, according to Orthodox custom. Helene Palaiologina and Helene Dragaš both selected the name Hypomone. Eirene Kantakouzene and Eirene Gattilusio chose 'Eugenia,' and Maria of Bulgaria came to be known as 'Makaria.' The monastic names of foreign-born empresses were usually derived from the name they had received on their arrival at the imperial court, so Anna of Savoy (originally baptized Johanna or Giovanna) became the nun Anastasia. Not all empresses followed the established custom, however. Theodora took the veil under the name 'Eugenia' (the well-born one), perhaps emphasizing her connection with the Laskarid imperial family. Maria-Rita selected the name 'Xene,' reflecting not only her foreign origin but perhaps a desire to leave worldly affairs behind as well as her pain over the loss of her family members.

Although unified in their decision to take the veil, none of the late Byzantine empresses is known to have become an abbess or to have guided a community of nuns.[1997] Also, contrary to the prevailing Orthodox custom that required nuns

1991 *Gregoras* I, 288 (VIII,2). After Simonis showed herself to her retinue in the monastic robe, her half-brother Constantine (who was accompanying her) tore the robe off and forced the princess to put on her royal attire.

1992 *LPP* III, 272 f.

1993 *Sphrantzes*, 182–186 (XLV,3 f.).

1994 *ODB* III, 2093 f.

1995 Salaville (1947), 106.

1996 Foreign princesses usually received a Greek name on their arrival in the Byzantine Empire. In most cases, these names were not bestowed during a baptism ceremony as most foreign princesses were not re-baptized but only participated in a special ritual during which they renounced their former beliefs and recited the Creed in the Orthodox form. For details, see Part 2, Chapter 1 of this study on becoming an empress in Byzantium.

1997 This lack of desire to lead in spiritual matters contrasts with Western holy queens, who often guided monastic communities. For details, see Thiellet (2004), 280 ff.

to reside in a convent and restricted their movement outside its walls,[1998] imperial empresses-nuns often continued to enjoy freedom of movement even after taking the veil. Clothed in her monastic robe, Maria-Rita (known by then as Xene) traveled, led negotiations, published documents, helped to conclude an alliance between her son and her son-in-law, and dispatched at least one embassy. Eirene Kantakouzene (as the nun Eugenia) journeyed to the Peloponnese (1361/2) to help her son and his family settle in the peninsula. Maria of Bulgaria (as the nun Makaria) accompanied her son, John VII, on his journeys to the West. Their greater freedom was apparently connected with the empresses' privileged position and their complicated personal stories. Moreover, the difficult situation of the late empire frequently demanded the services of the empress as governor and negotiator. Whether she was dressed in the imperial purple or the black habit of a nun was of little consequence.

Although many empresses-nuns did eventually take up residence in a convent, there was no one establishment that could be described as the traditional monastic retreat of the late Byzantine empresses. Theodora Palaiologina had sought to create such a haven for the women of her family by re-founding the Convent of Lips, but it is not certain whether any dowager empress ever entered it. Theodora herself apparently did not reside there (at least nothing in her rule suggests such an intention) since she took her vows in the palace only shortly before her death.[1999] Maria-Rita of Armenia and Anna of Savoy entered convents in Thessalonike, and Eirene Kantakouzene and Helene Palaiologina ended their days in the Convent of Kyra Martha.[2000] Sophia of Montferrat took her vows in Italy. The convents selected by the last two empresses to outlive their husbands, Eirene-Gattilusio and Helene Dragaš, remain unknown.

Empresses and the Orthodox Church

In the emperor's absence, the empress was called upon to represent imperial power, which included summoning and presiding over synods whenever the situation demanded. The only Palaiologan empress known to have performed this task was Anna of Savoy, who chaired several such gatherings during the period after the death of her husband in June 1341 until February 1347 when John VI Kantakouzenos took over this responsibility. While theological matters remained

1998 Theodora Palaiologina requires nuns to "refrain throughout their lives from leaving [the cloister]" except for "an event of dire necessity." For details, see *Delehaye, Typica*, 114, n. 15. (Trans.) *BMFD*, 1270, 15. For further details and literature, see Talbot (1998A), see especially 119.

1999 For the full argumentation against Theodora's residence in Lips, see her biography.

2000 *Schreiner, Kleinchroniken* I, 183, n. 22. For discussion, see *ibid.* II, 348 f. See also Barker (1969), 477 f. For details on the last years of the empress, see Barker (1969), 474–478.

in the hands of the representatives of the church, the empress was able to promote doctrines to suit her conscience or her momentary political objectives (as the biographical chapter on Anna reveals).

Late Byzantine empresses also had frequent interactions with the patriarchs, whom they hosted on various festive occasions and who occasionally intervened in the marital and family lives of the imperial couple. In 1261, Patriarch Arsenios helped to save the marriage of Michael VIII and Theodora by remonstrating with the emperor, who was planning to divorce his wife.[2001] Another patriarch, Athanasios I, offered to mediate the conflict between Andronikos II and Eirene-Yolanda[2002] after Eirene had left for Thessalonike. Later, he promised to intervene with the empress regarding the difficult financial situation of her son.[2003] In the case of an emperor's absence or demise, the patriarch could also be called upon to advise the governing empress on political matters. Andronikos III placed his wife in the care of Patriarch John XIV Kalekas before departing on a military expedition to Asia Minor,[2004] and the same patriarch later exercised significant influence over the reign of the widowed Anna of Savoy during the Second Civil War.

Besides their interactions with patriarchs, metropolitans, and other important representatives of the Orthodox Church, Palaiologan empresses retained a clerical staff of their own. According to *Pseudo-Kodinos*, it was headed by a *domestikos,* who "was the exarch [of the clergy of the empress]."[2005] Although the exact titles, number, and roles of these clerics remain unknown, they must have included the spiritual fathers to whom the empresses made their confessions as well as treasurers and scribes employed in the empresses' chanceries.

Being involved in the Orthodox Church occasionally meant that empresses had to choose sides in ecclesiastical controversies. A well-known example is Theodora, the wife of Justinian, who promoted the monophysite communion and even harbored a prominent monophysite inside her palace.[2006] The involvement of the late Byzantine empresses in the conflicts of the church seems to have been prompted more by necessity than by interest. The Arsenite schism[2007] with its anti-Palaiologan aspect failed to attract Theodora or Anna of Hungary, who did not wish to confront Michael VIII and endanger the succession of their sons. The same empresses likewise did not actively oppose the Union of Lyons,[2008] being unwilling to challenge Michael and expose the empire to further military encounters. It was

2001 *Pachymeres* I, 245 ff. (III,7).
2002 *Athanasios*, 124, (trans.) *ibid.*, *Letter 75*, 186, 188 (trans. 187, 189). For further details, see *ibid.*, 397 f. *Letter 97*, 252, (trans.) 253. For additional details, see *ibid.*, 427.
2003 *Athanasios*, *Letter 86.*
2004 *Gregoras* I, 496 (X,7).
2005 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 230, 231 fn. 673;
2006 Garland (1999), 23–29.
2007 1265–1309.
2008 Before 1274–1283.

only after her husband's death that Theodora Palaiologina recognized the danger posed by the Union to the continuation of the young dynasty and stepped forward to publicly reject this policy and support her son when he cancelled the Union at the Council of Blacherns in 1283. Another empress was involved in the controversy over the Union of Florence.[2009] Aware of the desperate situation of the empire and her sons' need for military support, Helene Dragaš supported John VIII and Constantine XI in their Unionist efforts. The hesychast controversy[2010] apparently captured the personal interest of the three empresses involved in it. While Anna of Savoy was initially acquainted only with the political bearing of hesychasm on the conflict between the Palaiologan and Kantakouzene dynasties, she seems to have come to a deeper understanding of the teaching during her reign in Thessalonike, where she became an admirer of Gregory Palamas, the city's metropolitan. Eirene Kantakouzene, possibly influenced by Nikephoros Gregoras, was first inclined to support the anti-hesychast movement but eventually joined the ranks of the hesychasts, which included her husband. Helene Palaiologina likewise supported the teachings of Gregory Palamas and, as an accomplished scholar herself, may actually have been well acquainted with Palamas's theological works.

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While the religious devotion of the late Byzantine empresses echoes the pious deeds of their predecessors, maintaining a pious reputation in the final centuries of the empire was difficult. Association with a union of the Catholic and Orthodox churches was quickly established, and its undoing required public penance. Palaiologan empresses were further disadvantaged because they could not engage in extensive foundation projects or charitable activities due to their limited resources. The available information suggests that they countered these challenges by supporting the Orthodox Church, becoming nuns, making pious gifts (however small) to the church and to the poor, and leading chaste lives. Still, for some, all of their efforts were futile. As the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* is read every year on the Feast of Orthodoxy, only nine Palaiologan empresses are commemorated as having fully satisfied the requirements of the Orthodox Church.

2009 C. 1439–1484.

2010 Beginning of the 14th century–c.1361.

XX Seasons of Life

Although a great deal has already been written about the lives, the deeds, and the everyday reality of Byzantine women,[2011] this study would not be complete without a look into the seasons of life of the Palaiologan empresses. The biographies illustrate how these princesses were constantly striving to dovetail their social roles and their imperial role throughout the course of their lives. While a detailed analysis of the available data goes beyond the framework of the present study, the following brief exploration of the youth, adulthood, and old age of the late Byzantine empresses will highlight some of the most important aspects of their roles as wives, mothers, widows, and rulers. This chapter also attempts to furnish the reader with a sense of the scope of the often conflicting demands made of these women at a turbulent period in the empire's history.

Hidden in the haze: childhood and youth

Late medieval imperial brides usually entered the limelight on their betrothal to the Byzantine emperor or imperial heir, an event that normally occurred during their teenage years or later; therefore, it is not surprising that the primary sources offer very little information about the childhoods of these women.[2012] Generally speaking, if a future empress was not brought up together with her fiancé in the imperial palace, she spent her early years in the home of her parents, surrounded by nurses and tutors like other children of royal or noble background. Yet as far as this particular group of women is concerned, this initial season of life could rarely be described as either peaceful or secure. According to the sources, Theodora, Maria-Rita, and Anna of Savoy lost their fathers when they were children, and Helene Dragaš was a young adolescent when her mother died. The loss of a parent was sometimes coupled with additional trauma. The mother of Maria of Trebizond, for example, was accused of adultery before her death, much to the shock and chagrin of the imperial family. Whatever the circumstances, the loss of a parent naturally

2011 Important studies include Laiou (1981). Laiou (1985). Connor (2004). Shepard (2008), 67–68. Brooks (2007A–B). Brooks (2006). Effenberger (2006). Gerstel–Talbot (2006). Kianka (1996). Kotzabassi (2011). Kyrris (1982). Nicol (1996). Talbot (1983). Further literature is mentioned in the footnotes of other chapters and in the bibliography.

2012 Dabrowska (1996), 68. For a broad introduction to the research of youth, see Ariantzi (2018), 1–18. For my observations on the youth of several late Byzantine (noble) women, see Melichar (2018). On building identity in the adolescent stage, see Ariantzi (2018A). For images of adolescents in Byzantine manuscripts, see Brubaker (2018). For an introduction to adolescence from the perspective of modern psychology, see Sirsch (2018).

created a sense of insecurity for the child, which often resulted in a close relationship with the remaining parent. Theodora Palaiologina, the wife of Michael VIII, is known to have forged a strong bond with her mother, Eudokia, who followed her daughter to Constantinople and stayed nearby throughout her life. Buried next to one another, the two women remained close even in death. Another example is Helene Dragaš, who nurtured a deep filial attachment for her father and bitterly mourned his death in 1395.

The childhood of the late Byzantine empresses was also frequently disrupted by political conflicts and even war. Anna of Hungary and Maria-Rita experienced civil war in their home countries, including flights to safety and separation from their parents. Eirene Palaiologina (along with her mother and siblings) was imprisoned by Andronikos III during the First Civil War. Young Helene Palaiologina experienced the siege of Didymoteichon by the troops of Anna of Savoy as well as the fear inspired by the possibility of Palaiologan collaborators inside the city. Moreover, she knew what it was to worry about her father's safety when the family had no news of him for extended periods during the Second Civil War. While the childhoods of many of these future empresses could certainly be characterized as traumatic, modern psychology has established that "experiences from early childhood may significantly impact psychological development but cannot decisively predetermine it."[2013] Even though the sources contain virtually no information on the later personality development of these empresses, anecdotal evidence suggests that most of them found other, positive experiences to serve as sources of assurance and self-confidence and to assist them in overcoming the fear and insecurity of their childhood years. Moreover, having already overcome so much adversity, they were able to meet with determination and fortitude the instability, demotions, and threats that many would face as adults as a result of their imperial role.

Once they were old enough to receive an education, the princesses acquired skills suitable for ladies of their social standing, such as reading,[2014] embroidery

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2013 Vágnerová (2000), 25. Translation mine.

2014 *Palaiologos*, 30. The recent study of Amelia Brown (Brown (2013), see especially 53), which offers a broad overview of the education of women from late Antiquity until the end of the Byzantine Middle Ages, shows that literacy was not rare among women of this period. Even though she can list only a few female scholars for every period, the primary sources reveal that the ability to read and write was expected from members of female monastic communities as well as from heroines of literary works. The daughters of Basil I were apparently able to read (Dagron (2003), 34), and Agathe, the daughter of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, could act as her father's secretary. Aristocratic women not only in Byzantium but also in the Balkans were also able to write. Besides the famous Anna Komnene of the middle Byzantine period, late Byzantine examples include Theodora Raoulaina and Eirene Palaiologina Choumnaina and Helene Palaiologina, the wife of John V, all of whom are known to have written letters, manuscripts, and texts. Literacy and the ability to write were not completely unknown among the princesses of the

and other handiwork, playing a musical instrument, and learning foreign languages.[2015] They were also expected to master skills connected with the life of the court, such as proper etiquette. Exceptionally, gifted female members of the aristocracy acquired a broader classical education. Empress Helene Palaiologina, an intellectual whose gifts may have been recognized and developed by her scholarly father, is a good example. Judging by her later interests and achievements, she must have received instruction in grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy in her early years.

Throughout the Byzantine era, empresses had to master court ceremonial and learn to perform to perfection their own part in it.[2016] Though the sources never specifically mention this training in the Palaiologan period, it was an unavoidable part of imperial life, and future empresses would have learned it partly by observing their mothers-in-law and partly through specific instruction received from the senior empresses, ladies-in-waiting, and masters of ceremonies.

For foreign-born brides,[2017] their knowledge of the Greek language played a central role in their integration into Byzantine society. By the late Middle Ages, Greek had ceased to be the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean world and, with the possible exceptions of the neighboring courts and a group of scholars in Italy, was not cultivated outside of Byzantium; therefore, foreign princesses, especially those of Latin background, had to learn Greek when they arrived in the empire. Since the interval between betrothal and departure for Constantinople was typically short, most of these young women presumably arrived with little or no previous knowledge of the language. (The case of Helene Dragaš was clearly an exception as she grew up at the Serbian court, a traditional recipient of Byzantine culture, and her stepmother was a native speaker of the Greek language.) Imperial brides apparently received instruction in grammar, vocabulary, and conversation from language tutors. Having acquired a solid foundation on which to build, child brides and young adolescents who required further instruction may have joined the lessons given to the children of the imperial family.

Balkans at this time either as the famous example of Jelena Balšić and the tsarinas Jefimija and Milica show. For details, see Vukovich (2011–2011).

2015 For the education of princesses and noblewomen in the West, see, for example, Thiellet (2004), 64 ff.

2016 Herrin (2001), 250: "when a teenage bride-to-be first arrived at the Great Palace, those responsible for teaching her about her public role were primarily concerned to make sure that she would conform to the needs of the court. The brief of her ladies-in-waiting, her eunuch servants and the officials attached to her quarters, was to ensure that she understood the cycle of ceremonies at which she would appear." For further details on the preparation of imperial princesses, see Herrin (2016).

2017 On the growing trend of selecting foreign princesses as brides for the emperor, see Kazhdan–Epstein (1985), 177 f.

Imperial marriage: cage or bridge to power?[2018]

According to canon law, Byzantine women were able to marry (and thus enter the adult world) at the age of twelve.[2019] The Byzantines were nevertheless aware that girls of this age were not yet fully physically and emotionally mature and did not possess the necessary experience to assume or represent imperial power. Consequently, the child brides (Anna of Moscow, Maria of Bulgaria, and Eirene-Yolanda) did not receive their crowns in the course of their wedding ceremonies but saw their coronations postponed until such time as they could confidently perform the duties of an *augousta.* Beatrice Caseau noted that these very young brides were "in fact deprived of their adolescence. They had to cross from childhood into adulthood without transition, especially when confronted with the task of managing servants, (...) as well as giving birth and parenting soon after the wedding."[2020] Very young brides were rare in late Byzantium, however, and most princesses married in their mid-to-late teens or early twenties. This was considered a suitable age for adjusting to a new role and, in the cases of foreign princesses, the linguistic and cultural demands of a new environment.

In late Byzantium it was always the husband, a blood relative of the previous emperor, who sanctioned the imperial position of his wife. This circumstance made the empress's influence in other areas dependent to a substantial degree on the success of her marriage. By forging a close relationship with her husband, an imperial consort could strengthen her own standing and increase her personal power. The stories of Eirene-Yolanda and Sophia of Montferrat reveal the dangers of a failed imperial marriage. At some point during her reign in Thessalonike, Eirene-Yolanda must have realized that her leaving the capital had suited her husband and that her 'independent domain' was, in fact, an honorable exile. Sophia of Montferrat, who ended her reign by escaping to an Italian convent, likewise had come to understand that no late Byzantine empress could truly succeed in her role without her husband's support.

On the other hand, Palaiologan empresses were generally less vulnerable than their predecessors to abuse at the hands of their husbands. In the early and middle periods, imperial marriages sometimes ended with the repudiation or even the execution of the wife. Constantine I, for example, ordered the execution of his wife Fausta, and Leo VI repudiated Theophano. In late Byzantium, imperial marriages nearly always ended with the natural death of one of the partners, more frequently that of the emperor. With the exceptions of the annulled marriage of John VIII and Sophia of Montferrat and the separation of Andronikos II and Eirene-Yolanda, Palaiologan emperors (such as Andronikos III and John

2018 For interesting observations on the position of the wife, see Hill (1999), 83–87. On marriage in Byzantium, see Meyendorff (1990).

2019 On sexual relations and marriage in Byzantium, see Kazhdan (1990).

2020 Caseau (2018), 26 f.

VI) separated from their wives exclusively to take monastic vows. Nevertheless, these favorable statistics do not reflect higher moral standards on the part of the emperors but rather the fact that they were in no position to make enemies abroad by rejecting their wives, most of whom represented important European houses. It is characteristic of the period that the two empresses whom their husbands had planned to divorce, Theodora Palaiologina and Helene Palaiologina, were both natives of Byzantium.

Unlike middle Byzantine emperors, who often lived openly with their mistresses,[2021] the extramarital affairs of the Palaiologan rulers were much less public. After the scandalous affair of the Nicene emperor John III Batatzes with Marchesina,[2022] the beautiful governess of his young bride, the sources rarely mention imperial paramours. The names Diplovatzina (the mistress of Michael VIII and the mother of the well-known Maria, lady of the Mongols) and Aspasia (the unfortunate mistress of Andronikos III) are recorded, but the identities of the (other) lovers of Andronikos II, Andronikos III, John V, Manuel II (?), and John VIII have fallen into oblivion. The fact that the sources report next to nothing about the women suggests that they were not members of the Byzantine elite (even if their children were publicly known and even used as pawns of imperial marital politics) and held no power (unlike their middle Byzantine counterparts, women like Maria Skleraina, Eudokia Ingerina, or Eudokia Komnene). In the Palaiologan era, the existence of imperial mistresses was a carefully guarded secret so that the imperial wives might not face public embarrassment. While some earlier empresses are known to have had lovers,[2023] the sources do not even hint that one of the late Byzantine empresses might have been unfaithful to her husband.

Although never forcibly confined to a convent (a fairly common fate among middle Byzantine empresses), Palaiologan imperial consorts were frequently subjected to the loss of their personal freedom. Maria-Rita, for example, was imprisoned by her father-in-law at the beginning of the First Civil War. When Andronikos IV was punished for his revolt against his father in 1373, Maria of Bulgaria was imprisoned along with him. A few years later, Andronikos turned the tables by taking his mother, Helene Palaiologina, hostage and imprisoning her in Galata. Finally, Eirene Palaiologina and her children were captured and imprisoned on Tenedos by John V. The fact that none of these imprisonments was the result of

2021 Lynda Garland points out an interesting detail regarding the liaisons of the middle Byzantine emperors and empresses when she stresses that most of their lovers came either from the imperial family or from members of the court or household (Garland (1995), 112). Nothing in the sources suggests that the lovers of Palaiologan emperors would have been recruited from the same circles. See also Kazhdan–Epstein (1985), 102.

2022 *Gregoras* I, 46 (II,7).

2023 See, for example, Garland (1995), 109. Garland (1997).

marital enmity could be construed as further evidence of both a greater respect on the part of the late Byzantine emperors for their wives and the latters' less independent place on the political stage.

Mothers of daughters and mothers of sons[2024]

An heir symbolized the peaceful continuation of a dynasty, and giving birth to a healthy, male child was traditionally considered the central duty of an empress.[2025] Her ability to bear and rear children was taken for granted, and she usually faced significant pressure to fulfill this role. From a perspective of power, producing a successor to the throne confirmed and strengthened the empress's own position at the imperial court and legitimized her ascent to the regency in the event of her husband's death.

Although Palaiologan emperors only exceptionally failed to produce an heir, their consorts did not always conceive easily. Anna of Hungary and Eirene-Yolanda allegedly needed to visit the miracle-working tomb of St. Euphrosyne the Younger in order to have children. Maria of Bulgaria gave birth to only one child as did her daughter-in-law, Eirene Gattilusio. As for Anna of Savoy, a full six years passed before she gave birth to her first son, John. Nevertheless, childlessness as such was rarely a problem for the empresses of this period. While the condition was considered shameful and could be disabling for imperial women in general,[2026] as the biographical chapters reveal, it was never the cause of a failed imperial marriage in late Byzantium.

Future rulers of the empire usually entered the world in a special chamber known as the Porphyra, originally built by Constantine V for his first wife, Eirene the Khazar, who gave birth to their son Leo IV there.[2027] Shortly after the imperial family returned to the ancient capital in 1261, Theodora Palaiologina gave birth to Constantine (the Porphyrogennetos) in the Porphyra, renewing the tradition. What is not clear is whether later empresses always journeyed to the dilapidated Great Palace for the deliveries of their children. Regardless of the pull of tradition, not all late Byzantine imperial children were born in this exclusive maternity ward,

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2024 Malamut (2016A), 343–346. On the importance of imperial mothers, see Dagron (2003), 40 f. Herrin (2014), 57 f. On the ideal of the empress-mother, see Hill (1999),78–83. Leszka–Leszka (2017), 76–88.

2025 On when and how late Byzantine empresses had children, see Dabrowska (1996), 96 f.

2026 Although three late Byzantine empresses never had children, this fact did not become a cause for divorce: Anna of Moscow died very young, the marriage of Sophia of Montferrat was probably not consummated, and the marriage of Maria of Trebizond was allegedly a happy one even though she failed to conceive. For more on childlessness, see Laiou (1985), 67.

2027 Herrin (2000), 27.

of course. As empresses often spent prolonged periods of time outside the capital city, several gave birth to offspring elsewhere, Anna of Hungary (Constantine) and Eirene-Yolanda (Simonis) in Asia Minor, Anna of Savoy (John V) in Didymoteichon, and Helene Dragaš (Andronikos) in Mistra.

Although the sources do not mention the ceremonies surrounding the birth of an imperial heir,[2028] the rituals of the Palaiologan era were probably similar to the baptismal ceremonies described in *De cerimoniis* (even if the objects used in the ceremony were less luxurious). In the middle Byzantine period, the rooms of the empress were specially decorated with gold-woven curtains and extra candleholders to add splendor to the event, which took place on the eighth day after the child's birth. The baby was carried to the porch of the church, where a priest prayed for him and gave him a name and a tunic. Afterwards, he was brought back to his mother and placed in a cradle, and both his bed as well as that of the empress were covered with golden rugs. The empress then received prayers, congratulations, and fitting gifts from the imperial household and from court officials, both male and female. For seven days following the birth, a special strengthening broth called *lochozema* (commonly served to mothers) was offered to officials in the palace as well as to the poor.[2029]

Despite the luxury and care surrounding the empress and her children, imperial motherhood was not devoid of perils. Empresses could be separated from their children by political circumstances as Helene Palaiologina learned when she and her husband left Constantinople in 1351 and she had to leave her two young children behind. Another empress, Eirene Kantakouzene, was separated from her son Andronikos when Anna of Savoy imprisoned him for several years during the Second Civil War. Neither were empresses spared the heartache of burying their children[2030] at various stages of development: Constantine (the son of Theodora Palaiologina), several of the children of Eirene-Yolanda, and the son of Eirene-Adelheid all died as infants. Andronikos, the third son of Eirene Kantakouzene, fell victim to the plague at the age of eight, and Andronikos V, the son of Eirene Gattilusio and John VII, died at about the same age. Manuel, the second son of Maria-Rita, was murdered in his teenage years. Several adult children also predeceased their mothers, including Anna, the daughter of Theodora Palaiologina; Michael, the son of Helene Palaiologina; and John VIII and Theodore, sons of Helene Dragaš.

The duties of an emperor's wife included supervising the running of the imperial household although many of the practical details and the day-to-day organization were certainly carried out by servants and court officials.[2031] She also saw to

2028 For the importance of the birth of an heir, see Dagron (2003), 41 f. For rituals connected with the birth of the imperial heir and their significance, see *ibid.*, 41–47.

2029 *De cerimoniis*, 619 (II,21). *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 619.

2030 On the death of children in Byzantium, see Talbot (2009).

2031 Smythe (1997), 144.

the upbringing and education of the imperial children[2032] and the training of her successor. This last task, that of helping future daughters-in-law grow into their roles, can be found in the writings of George Akropolites, who noted that the Nicene empress Eirene was bringing up Helene of Bulgaria, the bride of her son.[2033]

The relationship between an empress and her sons was influenced by the fact that sons generally remained in the empire. They were also first in line to inherit the throne and were more likely to cause conflict within the imperial family. The birth of a male child not only strengthened the position of an empress at the court but also typically involved her in political issues and even duties of government as the mother-son relationship evolved over time. Helene Palaiologina was called on to reign when her son Manuel had to leave Byzantium. Helene Dragaš became an important advisor to her sons, governed the empire in the absence of her son John VIII, and took an active role in the selection of a new emperor after John's death. Maria-Rita helped Andronikos III forge an alliance with his brother-in-law, the Bulgarian tsar, and mediated with the latter after he attacked Byzantium in 1328. Maria-Rita, Anna of Savoy, and Eirene Kantakouzene all helped restore peace within the imperial family by negotiating with power-hungry sons.[2034]

The relationship of an empress with her daughters, in contrast, was shaped by the fact that late Byzantine princesses were considered prized export goods. Despite the prohibition of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, who strongly advised against the marriage of female members of the imperial family to foreign rulers,[2035] Palaiologan emperors could not afford the luxury of keeping their daughters close to home. As Judith Herrin noted, the fact that late Byzantine imperial daughters were often married abroad represented an educational challenge for their mothers in that they could hardly prepare their offspring for an unfamiliar way of life.[2036] Mothers and daughters were soon parted, and further contacts were limited to correspondence and (rare) state or private visits. Only as widows could these princesses return home to spend the remainder of their lives in the family circle (as did Maria, the lady of the Mongols, the daughter of Michael VIII; Simonis, the daughter of Andronikos II; and Theodora, the daughter of John VI Kantakouzenos).

Retreating into the shadows: widowhood and death[2037]

While the sources do not list the indicators of old age in Byzantium, losing the ability to bear children was probably a defining moment for women. Reaching

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2032 Herrin (2000), 24 f. See also another study on Byzantine mothers by the same author (Herrin (1996)).

2033 *Akropolites* 233 (33). *Macrides, Akropolites*, 194, 197 (33).

2034 For details on embassies of imperial and noble women in late Byzantium, see Melichar (2017).

2035 *De admistrando imperio*, 70, 72 (13).

2036 Herrin (2012), 72.

2037 For an overview, see Leszka–Leszka (2017), 115–124.

old age[2038] also demanded that the necessary preparations be made for the end of life and occasionally led to the separation of the imperial couple as they entered the monastic estate. John VI Kantakouzenos and his wife Eirene took their vows following their abdication in December 1354. Manuel II and Helene Dragaš separated prior to the emperor's taking his vows shortly before his death in 1425. Exceptionally, the empress alone could take her vows before the death of her husband. While in earlier centuries such was the fate of repudiated imperial wives (like Maria of Amnia[2039]), in late Byzantium only Sophia of Montferrat chose to enter a convent because her husband refused to accept her. While all of the imperial widows of this period eventually took monastic vows, it did not prevent them from remaining in the palace, being involved in matters of government (usually at the behest of their sons), or traveling.[2040] Furthermore, widowhood has rightly been described as the strongest season of a woman's life from the perspective of the law[2041] as it is generally recognized that Byzantine widows enjoyed greater freedom in decisions relating to their persons and their property than their married counterparts. Nevertheless, for a widowed empress, the death of her husband usually meant that she had lost all claims to direct political power – unless she was the mother of a minor son, in which case there was a possibility that she might be called upon to assume the regency.

A newly widowed empress was expected to mourn her husband for nine days.[2042] During this time, she participated in memorial ceremonies, received condolences, and listened to monodies performed by important scholars and officials of the imperial court. Late Byzantine works do not offer any scenes of desperate mourning, except in the case of Anna of Savoy, who remained in the Hodegon Monastery for three days after Andronikos's death to bewail her fate. Although tradition dictated that Byzantine women prepare the burials of their deceased family members, the rituals connected with an emperor's funeral were complex and involved too many people to be organized by a single individual. For this reason, most of the widowed empress's duties on this occasion were assumed by masters of ceremonies and imperial officials. However, an empress could choose a burial place for her family members as Theodora Palaiologina did for her son Andronikos II or Helene Dragaš did for Anna of Moscow.

2038 Unlike today, when the elderly often have a low social status and are summarily perceived as lacking competence and character (Vágnerová (2000), 444), in Byzantium, the elderly were considered trustworthy and less likely to succumb to temptation. They were also more likely to attain sainthood. For details, see Talbot (1984), especially 273.

2039 For details, see Garland (1999), 84 f.

2040 The fact that widowhood offered Byzantine empresses greater freedom is confirmed, for example, by Judith Herrin (Herrin (2001), 75).

2041 Hill (1999), 16.

2042 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 264 (XII), (trans.) 265. For the mourning of Anna of Savoy, see *Kantakouzenos* II, 14 (III,1).

Death[2043]

According to the sources, the late Byzantine imperial consorts generally died of old age or disease. Only one empress, Anna of Hungary, may have succumbed to complications related to childbirth.[2044] Their passing seems to have been a private matter with only a few relatives, priests, or nuns in attendance. Emperors were rarely present for their wives' final hours either because they were no longer alive or because urgent political matters demanded their presence elsewhere. For the same reasons, they were often absent from the funeral ceremonies, and the task of accompanying the empresses on their final journeys fell to their children, fellow nuns, imperial officials, and masters of ceremonies.

De cerimoniis describes in detail the funeral rites performed for an emperor and specifically states that the burial of an empress followed the same pattern.[2045] When an empress died, the fact was first announced to the people. Her body was washed, clothed in splendid robes and a crown, and placed in the palace, where she lay in state.[2046] (This part of the ritual could not always be performed. The body of Anna of Moscow, who had died of the plague, must have been buried posthaste in the Convent of Lips.)

The sources reveal that the emperor mourned the passing of his wife for fifteen days.[2047] During this time, he put aside his customary black *sakkos* and donned "white clothes[2048] for as long a time as he wished, then he put on yellow clothes without borders, then he wore the same with borders, and afterwards he wore bright clothing"[2049] or the *sakkos.* The common people and the nobility likewise expressed their grief at the loss of their mistress by changing their mode of dress: "During the period when the emperor wears white (...) everyone wears black, not only the holders of court titles but also the people. When the emperor wears yellow, the close relatives of the deceased dress in black, when they are in his presence, for forty days, and afterwards they wear blue until the emperor changes his attire. Then they wear bright clothing."[2050]

2043 For a detailed exposition on Byzantine beliefs regarding death as well as a description of the funeral rites and rituals, see Marinis (2017). On the burials of empresses in general, see Albani (1991). On the middle Byzantine period, see Malamut (2016A), 371 ff., Malamut (2016). Karlin-Hayter (1991), 126. Leszka–Leszka (2017), 123.

2044 *Pachymeres* IV, 515 (XII,2).

2045 *De cerimoniis*, 275 f. (I,60), (trans.) *Moffat, Ceremonies*, 275 f. In respect to the burial of the empress, *De cerimoniis* explicitly states, "Note that the same format and the same ceremonial and ritual exists also for the burial of the *augousta*."

2046 Karlin-Hayter (1991), 126–132. On the rituals of preparing the dead, see also Brooks (2011–2012), 319 f.

2047 *Syropoulos*, 542 (IX,20). *Kantakouzenos* I, 193 f. (I,39).

2048 On white clothes and their symbolism, see Brooks (2011–2012), 320.

2049 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 262 (XII), (trans.) 263.

2050 *Pseudo-Kodinos*, 262 f. (XII), (trans.) 263 f.

Finally, the empress's body was taken to the place of burial. Before the body was moved, the master of ceremonies intoned three times, "Go out, empress, the Emperor of Emperors and the Lord of Lords summons you." Afterwards, the deceased was carried from the palace,[2051] still wearing her crown, in an impressive procession consisting of the highest representatives of the imperial court (including the emperor himself, if present), accompanied by the ritual singing of psalms. The procession continued to the monastery where the empress was to be buried (possibly by a special route so that the people could pay their last respects).[2052] When the body arrived at the tomb, the master of ceremonies recited three times, "Go in, empress, the Emperor of Emperors and the Lord of Lords summons you," after which he said, "Take the imperial crown from your head." The crown was then exchanged for a band of plain purple. Finally, the body was placed in the tomb, and the vigil began (usually forty days, as in the case of Theodora[2053]), accompanied by solemn speeches given by distinguished scholars.[2054]

The tombs of most of the late Byzantine empresses have been destroyed, but research from the burial sites has provided clues as to their appearance. High-born and imperial women were buried in marble *sarcophagoi* decorated with images of the empresses and their children, angels, and saints, an example being the tombstone of Theodora Petraliphaina in Arta.[2055] Some of the *sarcophagoi* were surrounded by elaborate painting and rich decoration like the tomb of Theodora Palaiologina in Lips.[2056] In late Byzantium, sepulchers were made from several pieces of stone, which necessitated the burial of the body under the church floor.[2057] Palaiologan burial markers sometimes included elaborate poetry, expressing hope for eternal life with God.[2058]

The funeral ceremonies were sometimes complicated by the fact that the empress had died outside the capital city. This was the case with Anna of Hungary (who died in Asia Minor), Eirene-Yolanda (died in Drama), Eirene-Adelheid (died in Rhadeistos),[2059] and Maria-Rita and Anna of Savoy (died in Thessalonike). Depending on the empress's wishes, her body could be carried to Constantinople to be buried in one of the monasteries there. (This was true for Eirene-Yolanda and Eirene-Adelheid). An emperor could, however, decide against transferring the remains. Michael VIII ordered that Anna of Hungary be laid to rest, with all due

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2051 Karlin-Hayter (1991), 132–134.
2052 Karlin-Hayter (1991), 134–139.
2053 *Pachymeres* IV, 413 (XI,4).
2054 Karlin-Hayter (1991), 140–147. Hill (1999), 77.
2055 For details on the tomb, see Orlandos (1936). For Theodora Petraliphaina, see *PLP*, n. 5664.
2056 *Delehaye, Typica*, 130, 42. Talbot (1992), 300.
2057 Brooks (2007A), 98 f.
2058 Brooks (2007A), 99, 104.
2059 See also Dabrowska (1996), 127.

ceremony, in Nymphaion. For political reasons connected with the controversy over the Union of Lyons, Andronikos II preferred not to risk moving the body of his beloved wife to the capital even after his father's death.

In her study of the burials of Byzantine emperors, Patricia Karlin-Hayter claims that when rulers retired to a monastery, their "funeral[s] became private affair[s] (. . .)."[2060] It is reasonable to assume that the fact that several late Byzantine empresses died as nuns must have given their burial ceremonies (particularly for those who had resided in convents prior to their demise) a more private character as well. Instead of imperial robes, these women would have been dressed in their monastic attire, and their bodies would have lain in the convent's chapel rather than in the palace. Nor would there have been a procession through the city, which would account for the fact that the deaths of several late Byzantine empresses went unnoticed by historiographers. Eirene Kantakouzene and her daughter Helene are examples of important empresses for whom no source or chronicle mentions a year of death. Both died in the community of Kyra Martha and were buried there.

Throughout the empire's history, imperial consorts repeatedly founded shrines where the physical remains of the members of their families were to be gathered. The mausoleum in Gastria to which Empress Euphrosyne brought the remains of her divorced parents, Constantine VI and Maria of Amnia, is a well-known example. In the Palaiologan period, Theodora closed the line of pious founders when she established the Convent of Lips as a burial ground for the imperial family. While several of her close relatives were indeed buried there, only three empresses are known to have found their final resting place at Lips: Theodora herself, Eirene-Adelheid, and Anna of Moscow. The others were laid to rest with their husbands in the Pantokrator, in family foundations (such as the aforementioned Kyra Martha), or elsewhere (in Thessalonike or Asia Minor).

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Despite their diverse fates, the origins and experiences of the late Byzantine empresses evince distinct similarities. All were women of noble background and were raised and educated in elite circles. Though free from material worries, their childhoods were marked by the premature loss of parent(s), insecurity, and illness – just like those of children from humbler backgrounds. Their distinguished marriages demanded premature separation from family and often led to these women being entangled in complex political circumstances that ultimately caused some of them to be imprisoned or exiled. On the other hand, Palaiologan imperial marriages were generally less prone to scandal and infidelity than those of earlier periods. Childlessness was also rare in the imperial families of late Byzantium, but motherhood was not without heartache. Empresses were regularly separated from their daughters, who were married to foreign princes, and death robbed them of both sons and daughters at various stages of life. Those empresses who reached

2060 Karlin-Hayter (1991), 120.

old age often outlived their husbands. As widows, they took monastic vows but frequently continued to be involved in public affairs.

While it is impossible to establish clear-cut attributes for an archetypal late Byzantine empress, 'foreign bride,' 'negotiator,' and 'pious woman' highlight some of the main tendencies that can be gleaned from the primary sources regarding Palaiologan imperial consorts, their social roles, and strategies. These traits are quite different to characterizations of earlier empresses, which might have included 'Byzantine beauty,' 'sovereign ruler,' or 'magnanimous founder' (or, perhaps, 'wayward wife'). On the one hand, foreign origin (for the majority), diminished financial resources, and decreased access to direct political power all served to limit the position of the empress during this period. On the other hand, Palaiologan empresses did not passively surrender to their disadvantages but improvised new ways to serve the empire by negotiating and intervening, advising and enduring, all of which, in turn, helped to enhance their imperial authority and increase the popularity of the dynasty. These women also frequently overcame their lack of means in creative ways, one of the most notable being how they chose to prove their devotion by humbly accepting the monastic veil as a non-pecuniary path to achieving the pious reputation that was both their duty and their due.

Epilogue

After the death of the beautiful Maria of Trebizond in 1439, there were to be no further empresses on the Byzantine throne. When John VIII died in 1448, the crown passed to his brother, Constantine XI Dragaš. Constantine had been married twice before his coronation: in July 1428, he wedded Maddalena Tocco (the niece of Carlo Tocco, ruler of Epiros), who came to be known in Byzantium as Theodora Palaiologina. She died in childbirth in November of the following year. For a number of years, Constantine remained single, but in August 1441 he finally remarried. Sadly, his new wife, Caterina Gattilusio, also died in childbirth (along with her child) one year after the wedding. As Constantine was neither emperor nor heir to the throne at the time of their deaths, the brief stories of these women are not included among the biographies of the Byzantine empresses.

In the 1440s, only one crowned empress represented female imperial power. As a counterpart to St. Helene, who had supported Constantine I in the founding of Byzantium, Helene Dragaš was destined to watch as her son, Constantine XI, led a dying empire through its final years. Since she had already witnessed the gradual subjugation of her native Serbia at the hands of the Ottomans, it was perhaps fortunate that Helene passed away in 1450 before Byzantium had succumbed to the same fate.

After Constantine XI became emperor, his legates began to seek a new bride for him. Initially, they attempted to win over Beatrix of Portugal, later, one of the princesses from Trebizond or Georgia (1449), and finally, Mara Branković (1451), the widow of Sultan Murad II. In the end, none of these women occupied the imperial throne. Constantinople fell to the Turks, and its last emperor, Constantine XI, died on the battlements defending it.[2061]

Polánky, August 19, 2018

2061 For an overview of embassies, see Malamut (2002), especially 435–438.

Glossary[2062]

adelphaton	an economic relationship between an individual and a monastic house in which the former donated money or land in exchange for a lifelong, fixed provision from the latter.
ambo	a pulpit, usually situated in the middle of a church, reached by a single or double staircase, used for a variety of ceremonies, including the reading of the gospels, preaching, and coronations.
augousta	the honorary title of a crowned empress.
autokrator	the Greek translation of the Latin 'imperator' (emperor). From the ninth century this title designated the senior emperor.
autokratorissa	a title applied to an empress, derived from that of her husband (*autokrator*). In late Byzantium it was mostly used by empresses who were involved in governance.
baion	the golden scepter of the late Byzantine empresses. It resembled a palm branch and was decorated with precious gems and pearls.
basileus	the classical Greek word for 'king' and the main title used for an emperor in Byzantium.
Basilika	a new codification of Roman law, translated into Greek, begun under Basil I (867–886) and completed under Leo VI (886–912).
basilissa	the classical Greek word for 'queen,' throughout the middle Byzantine period the title of an empress, in late Byzantium mostly bestowed on the wives of despots.
bema	the part of a church where the altar is located, sometimes translated as 'sanctuary.' Reserved for the higher orders of the clergy, it was raised several steps and closed off by the chancel barrier.
Blacherns	a residential complex (palace) of the imperial family from the Komnenos era, located in the northeastern part of Constantinople.
Blues	supporters of one of the two principal factions (*demes*) of the hippodrome of Constantinople in the early and middle Byzantine periods.
chartophylax	an ecclesiastical official originally entrusted with archival and notarial duties, who gradually became a close associate of the patriarch in the middle and late Byzantine periods.
cellarer	a monastic official in charge of victuals.
chlamys	an outer garment fastened at the right shoulder by means of a fibula. The purple chlamys and the crown were the principal symbols of imperial dignity in the early and middle Byzantine periods.

2062 These definitions were partly adopted from or based on information provided by *ODB*, Dagron (2003), and Garland (1999), 241–245.

chrysobull the most solemn document of the imperial chancery, it comprised a complete date, the signature of the emperor in cinnabar-based (purple) ink, and a golden seal (*bulla*) attached by a silk cord.
koubikoularia a lady-in-waiting, usually of noble origin.
Daphne the oldest part of the Great Palace in Constantinople, dating back to Constantine the Great.
deesis intercession, especially of the Theotokos and/or a saint with Christ on behalf of a sinner. It was frequently depicted in Byzantine churches.
despoina 'mistress,' used as a title by the empress from the eighth century and prevalent in the late Byzantine period.
divitision a tunic or robe of silk worn beneath the *chlamys* or the *sagion*.
ephoros the lay administrator of a monastery or nunnery, in charge of its economic affairs.
ecclesiarchissa a nunnery official in charge of preparing the church for ceremonies and equipping it with the necessary objects.
eparch the civil governor of Constantinople.
epi tou stratou the leader of the army, a general.
epikombion a small sachet with three gold, three silver, and three copper coins, distributed on festive occasions such as coronations, also *apokombion*.
euchologion a prayer book.
filioque a controversy between the Orthodox and Catholic churches regarding the Holy Spirit. The Orthodox Church believes that the Holy Spirit proceeds from God the Father alone while the Catholic Church teaches that the Holy Spirit proceeds from God the Father and God the Son.
globus cruciger an orb, surmounted by a cross, that appears in Byzantine coinage as a symbol of sovereignty. The globe represents the world.
Great Palace the large imperial palace complex situated in the southeastern corner of Constantinople, inhabited by emperors and empresses from the fourth until the eleventh century. Even after it fell into disrepair and the imperial family relocated to the Blacherns Palace, it continued to be used on certain festive occasions such as the coronation reception of the emperor or imperial couple.
Greens supporters of one of the two principal factions (demes) of the hippodrome in Constantinople in the early and middle Byzantine periods.
gyneceum the women's quarters in a palace or an aristocratic household, also *gynaikonitis*.
hegoumenos the superior of a monastic institution.
himation a cloak or upper garment.
horismos an order of lesser importance than the *chrysobull*, usually issued by an empress, *doux*, despot, or metropolitan.
icon a representation of a saint, generally painted on a wooden panel.

iconoclast	an opponent of the veneration of images.
iconophile	a defender of the veneration of images.
kastrophylax	the commander (named by the emperor) of a castle or fortress.
kral	literally 'king,' the title of the Serbian tsar, also used by the Byzantine sources.
logothetes	a high-ranking imperial official.
loros	originally an elaborately decorated consular robe. In the Byzantine period, it took the form of a long, jeweled scarf wrapped around the body. In the ninth century, the scarf was replaced by a simplified *loros* put on over the head. The emperor, the empress, and certain high-ranking dignitaries wore the *loros* on special occasions such as Easter.
megalos dioiketes	a high-ranking fiscal official.
megas domestikos	after the emperor, the supreme commander of the army.
megas doux	the grand admiral of the imperial fleet.
megas logothetes	the head of civil administration.
menologem	a dating formula that served as the signature of the emperor. It consisted of the month and the indiction written in red ink.
mesazon	a confidant of the emperor in charge of the administration of the empire.
metatorion	the room in (or curtain behind) which the emperor changed his robes during ceremonies.
Metochion	a smaller monastic house that was subject to a larger monastery.
metropolitan	the bishop of a provincial capital, or metropolis, who answered directly to the patriarch and had authority over the suffragan bishops of the province.
monophysite	an adherent of the monophysite teaching.
monophysitism	a widespread religious sect that emerged in the mid-fifth century, it taught that Christ had only one (divine) nature, bypassing his human nature.
nomisma	a gold coin. The name is usually used to refer to the late Roman solidus, struck at 72 to the Roman pound of gold (6 to the ounce) and equivalent to 12 *miliaresia* (silver coins) or 288 *folles* (copper coins).
myron	chrism, a perfumed liquid (a mixture of oil, balsam, and fragrant substances) made for certain festivals or miraculously emanating from the bodies of saints.
novel	a new law issued by an emperor.
oikonomia	'economy,' a principle of concession by which ecclesiastical law could be relaxed under certain circumstances.
oikonomos	a monastic official in charge of the administration of the properties of his monastery.
parakoimomenos	the guardian of the emperor's bedchamber, a close personal servant of the ruler.

patriarch	the incumbent of one of the five major sees: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem or Constantinople. In the present work, the term is mainly used to refer to the patriarch of Constantinople.
pendilia	the pendants hanging down on either side of the imperial crown, falling to ear level, also *prependoulia.*
porphyrogennetos	a male child born to a reigning emperor in the Porphyra (purple chamber) of the Great Palace in Constantinople, female form *porphyrogenneta.*
prokypsis	an elevated wooden platform. Also, a ceremony during which the emperor, his successor, or an imperial bride was displayed on an illuminated, wooden platform that was covered by curtains. After the curtains opened, the member(s) of the imperial family were greeted by the gathered crowds.
prooimion	the introductory section of a literary work.
proskynesis	a gesture of respectful greeting or of reverence, ranging from full prostration to genuflection or a simple bow.
Prostagma	an imperial order.
protosebastos	a grand title of the imperial court, mostly bestowed on relatives of the emperor and important members of the aristocracy.
Romaioi	'the Romans,' a term used by the Byzantines to describe themselves.
sacristan	a monk or nun who took care of the sacred books and vessels in a monastery.
sakkos	originally made of sackcloth, the clothing of the penitent and ascetics. In late Byzantium, the black, imperial *sakkos* was a knee-length, T-shaped tunic with broad sleeves. It was worn on festive occasions, including coronations or *prokypsis.*
sarkophagos	a stone coffin in the shape of a trough.
skaramangion	a tunic or robe of silk, less luxurious than the *divitision*, sometimes worn with a belt and sword.
solea	a pathway, usually raised (although it could be marked on the ground), that linked the sanctuary platform (*bema*) to the *ambo.*
solidus	a gold coin (in Greek, *nomisma*).
stamenon	or *histamenon*, originally used to designate the successor of the *solidus* coin. It was concave, wider, and thinner than its predecessor. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the word '*stamenon*' came to be used for concave *billon* and copper *trachea* coins.
stauraton	a name originally used for the *nomisma.* In late Byzantium, it was used to designate heavy silver coins (8.5 g, later 6 g).
stemma	an imperial crown, usually surmounted by a cross and ornamented with pearls or enamels, originally without a cap.
stephanos	a less elaborate form of crown, worn by empresses prior to their coronation.

synod	a gathering of the highest ranks of the clergy, usually for the purpose of passing judgment on doctrinal matters, resolving controversies, or recording patriarchal decisions.
Synodikon of Orthodoxy	a record begun after the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843. It has three parts: thanksgiving, the eulogies of emperors, empresses, patriarchs, confessors, and martyrs, and condemnation of heretics and their teachings. Entries continued to be added almost until the end of the Byzantine Empire.
Theotokos	Mother of God (Mary, the mother of Jesus).
topos	a traditional theme in literature.
typikon	the foundational charter or rule of a monastic institution.
zoste patrikia	'mistress of the girdle,' the principal lady-in-waiting at the court during the middle Byzantine period.

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